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The AAR Committee on Teaching and Learning (Eugene V. Gallagher, Chair) sponsors *Spotlight on Teaching.* It appears twice each year in *Religious Studies News* and focuses on teaching and learning around a particular theme, concern, or setting.

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TEACHING DIFFICULT SUBJECTS

Cynthia Ann Humes, Claremont McKenna College
Guest Editor

From the Editor's Desk

Tazim R. Kassam
Spotlight on Teaching *Editor*

THE TOPIC for this issue of *Spotlight on Teaching* was inspired by a panel discussion arranged by Cynthia Humes last year at Claremont McKenna College titled "Teaching Difficult Topics." Cynthia invited panelists to describe "specific challenges and encounters that they faced in their courses, and to illustrate from their own experience what teaching strategies they used in response to a charged and contentious classroom setting."

Although religion in world events is repeatedly front-page news, public understanding of its complexity is more constrained than ever. The stakes of remaining ignorant and misinformed get higher as political interests and religious groups compete for their own agendas. The world enters the classroom both in the faces of students, and in the situated positions which professors themselves assume and signify. Taking cover in the safety of enlightenment boundaries between perceiver and perceived, subject and object is no longer an honest option.

So how do we teach in classes where the subject peers at itself in the mirror of the texts, lectures, and images studied? Students in our classrooms are not (and never were) blank pages on which we can write as we might do our articles and books. Our interactions are not one-way monologues nor should they be. But co-constructivist pedagogy and power/knowledge critiques of academe have also raised challenges. Classrooms often turn into sites of contestation by design or default that put to test the very premises of hard-won scholarly coherences recast as regimes of oppression. Exercise of free speech clashes with political correctness; academic freedom collides with identity politics; cultural criticism contends with historical revisionism; critical analysis and (con)textual study come up against subjectivism and the primacy of experiential and embodied knowledge.

This issue of *Spotlight* takes up the question of teaching "difficult" subjects. It turns out, as we learn from the collection of essays, that the term difficult is understood, encountered, and dealt with in many different ways. Difficult may refer to topics that are tricky, thorny, sensitive, controversial, offensive, and simply just demanding; critical methods that subvert received knowledge and unsettle the status quo; assertions and/or disavowals of the professor's or student's specific religious, political, or sexual identity; radical suspicion of any and all knowledge construction and production in academe. Keeping the definition of difficult wide open, professors from various perspectives offer their views and share their strategies in response to these often insoluble difficulties.

In his piece titled "Common-Sense Religion," Daniel C. Dennett noted that most people in the world say their lives would be meaningless without religion, and then tartly asks, whoever would want to interfere with whatever it is that gives people's lives meaning? But for one thing: what do we do with creeds that oblige devout followers to behave intolerantly or violently? (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 20, 2006, B6). What is lost in translation, of course, is the distance that spans the gap between creed and act, a distance made up of very specific factors such as who, what, when, why, and where.

Nonetheless, the question is apt and sensible. A persistent dilemma in fields such as the study of religion and culture, one made ever more urgent by the realities of pluralism up close, is what we see as our role in our classrooms. Should we only be translators and transmitters of different religious cultures, or are we also obliged to engage in historical analysis and cultural critique? Is our primary role to show "the internal logic of religious systems" and not to "defend or debunk anyone's truth claims"? (Rycenga, iv) Or has phenomenological epoché devolved into a PC routine of "finding ways to say everyone is right if only properly understood" (Cummings, v)? Should we bring the communities we study into the classroom to "shift from an expert model of knowledge production to a collaborative model" (Arnold, x)? Or can such porous and blurred boundaries inadvertently subject students to intimidation and preempt their ability to think independently, especially when the communities in question don't particularly "like the idea of the course at all" (Hawley, iii)?

Then, too, not only are scholarly representations of specific religions a valid object of critical analysis, as in Edward Said's critique of Euro-American Orientalist "constructions of an anti-Islamic discourse" (Kassam, vi); but so, too, are representations of religious groups themselves who claim to speak authentically and authoritatively for all Muslims and, for example, declare "the Sunni legal tradition as the norm" (Schubel, vii).

Lest we think of "difficult" purely in intellectual terms, the sight of a student or professor's tears visibly remind us of the emotions that well up in the classroom when "desires for knowledge move us . . . in unexpected ways" (Henking, viii). And that giving voice to those who have been marginalized is full of ironies when speech is used to silence those who have silenced others. "Not all silence/ing is bad; not all voice/ing is good" (Maldonado, ix), and both can hurt and anger.

The insanity of war and genocide takes us to the very extremities of the human capacity for inhumanity. What do we do when the subject itself evokes "strong feelings of anxiety, shame, guilt, fear, anger, horror, hopelessness" (Graham, xi)? The history of ethnic cleansing and religious genocide appears not to have been much of a lesson, much as Cassandra's prescient warnings about the future fall on plugged ears. How does one square the moral imperative to know the past with the knowledge that "material about trauma can induce . . . 'vicarious trauma'" (Dobkowski and Salter, xii)?

Teaching difficult subjects, as we see, often goes beyond our imaginings, and our classrooms are crucibles of learning not just for students but for teachers, too. As Cynthia Humes concludes from her own unforeseen difficulties, "what we do as scholars actually matters" (Humes, ii).

Gurus, Swamis, and Others

Cynthia Ann Humes, Claremont McKenna College

Cynthia Ann Humes is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Claremont McKenna College. Her publications cover topics such as the contemporary use of Sanskrit literature, modern ritual in North Indian goddess worship, political and economic dimensions of modern Hinduism, and women's roles and experience in world religions and, more recently, Hinduism in the West and specifically, gurus. She currently acts as Chief Technology Officer, and teaches the course "Gurus, Swamis, and Others."

IN "GURUS, Swamis, and Others," my goal is to immerse my students in the academic study of Hindu religious leadership. This is challenging for several reasons. First, my students have been exposed to varying impressions of many of the Hindu leaders who have come to America in recent times. Each of these gurus, swamis, and others has brought his or her own conceptual and cultural matrix, and that matrix has become interfaced with a dominant American cultural matrix. In doing so, fascinating cultural transformations have occurred. Many of my students thus come to the subject with very firm opinions about some of these gurus, swamis, and others, and what "true" religious leadership should be. Simultaneously they rarely have an awareness of historical antecedents to this new wave of spiritual migration. The topic of Hindu religious leadership is difficult, too, because although there are excellent resources for the study of early Hindu models of religious leadership, there is a relative dearth of scholarly materials in English on modern examples. Finally, this topic is difficult for me personally, because it forces me to confront the unusual path I have taken in my own research and teaching.

The True Guru

In the most recent class, about half of the students had experiences with guru movements and the other half fell into the category of those curious about but almost completely unfamiliar with the subject. "Insider" students posed a challenge in that their gurus taught them the "correct" interpretation of Hindu thought, leading to difficulties in appreciating historical and regional nuances. However, I discovered that on balance, they had a clear advantage because of their familiarity with many shared (albeit contested) cultural terms and concepts, in comparison to their curious but not yet "enlightened" peers.

Students coming to the topic with little background are primarily disadvantaged because of their exposure to popular literature and prevailing wisdom on gurus and other Hindu leaders in the West — particularly on the Internet. These sources are oftentimes extremely biased or simply wrong. For example, on the Internet especially, purportedly informational sites blend haphazardly the many varieties of practice and meditation in Hindu leadership into a one-size-fits-all frame, leaving me with little recourse but to warn students initially "just don't go there" so as to forestall utter confusion. Such sites belie the complex philosophical and historical origins of Hindu forms of leadership I seek them to learn.

Students less versed in the topic often question the propriety of Hindu religious authority. The idea of "surrender" to a guru is often considered to be a cardinal signal of a "cult." I find the common use of the term "cult" to describe guru movements revealing, demonstrating the success of "Anti-Cult" action groups in successfully stigmatizing certain models of Hindu leadership and discipleship. For example, leaders who taught mantric recitation were cast as instilling brainwashing or "mind control," such that "victims" who had been duped into joining these "cults" were best "deprogrammed." Transcendental Meditation (TM) led by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, for example, became the specific target of the Cult Awareness Network, the largest and most successful of the Anti-Cult groups (and which was eventually found guilty of conspiracy to kidnap in a "deprogramming" case involving a member of the Life Tabernacle Church).

Each guru or tradition of Hindu leadership has sought to instill a new, privileged worldview, often using the same terms, but in markedly different ways. I, too, sought to teach them a new language, that of academia. Accordingly, one of the assignments is to have the students prepare for a lengthy vocabulary quiz that introduces this problem endemic to teaching about gurus: students must gain mastery over the discipline of religious studies as well as the disciplines introduced by the teachers we were studying. I do not provide static definitions. Students are each assigned a set of words and are required to create the definitions and send them to class members for their input via a course Web site. Once the definition is thoroughly vetted through thinking together in a team environment, I post the terms online in a shared glossary. Concepts are often updated as we progress in the course, reflecting the specific nuances different leaders bring to a contested term. I have invariably found that if I introduce this step, students are better prepared to work with the materials, willing to trust in the collective intelligence of the class and the value of team learning, and able to fathom better the historical development and context of key concepts.

I ask specific comparative questions throughout the course, seeking ever-more-complex analysis. Students new to the concepts of the course are able to stabilize, through repeated use, certain appropriate mental connections to academic reasoning, and deepen those connections through intellectual hooks to facts and evidence to support their theses. This comparative method allows students to develop a deeper understanding of ideas and material, and it improves their complex thinking skills even as it fosters greater confidence in their abilities to understand complex new thought systems. For each model of leadership, we develop the intellectual world that makes it intelligible to willing followers. By constructing together the terms and warrants each believer is expected to accept, we fill out all major structures in each system, thus providing students entry into a worldview understandable on its own terms. At the same time, the very process of isolating the specific terms and warrants, and not asking students to accept their veracity but to understand how they support the system, aptly addresses the challenge posed by students' incredulity that people would take these religious leaders seriously.

Building the Course

There are excellent resources for studying early patterns of religious leadership. For example, there are many studies of the roles of religious functionaries in Vedism, Brahmanism, and especially in the Upanishads. One can find detailed studies of bhakti leaders, philosophers and movements associated with them, and early gurus, swamis, and others. There are excellent materials, too, on religious leaders of the Hindu Renaissance, for example, Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra Sen, Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda, Ramakrishna, and others.

My interest in religious leadership, however, extended to current movements, and I found it difficult to counter the embarrassment of not-so-riches of the Internet with corresponding academic materials on recent gurus. There also seemed to be a relative dearth of academic venues to present in if I were to embark on preparing appropriate materials for teaching and research in the study of such gurus and Hindu leaders.

To some degree, the respective wealth and absence of materials reflected the American Academy of Religion. For several decades, work on Hinduism was largely presented within the single section called "Religion in South Asia" or RISA. Until recently, the field has thus been predominately regionally based, allowing focused treatment of Hindu subjects as well as how traditions within the South Asian subcontinent interrelate, but the field did not extend to global phenomena. I began to reach out to others inside and outside of RISA to form a Hinduism Group unit at the AAR, creating in 1997 a new venue not locked in geography and in which American and global forms of Hinduism, for example, could readily be studied. In 2001, I put together a panel on great gurus, out of which eventually came a 2005 book, which I now use as a major textbook in this course. *Gurus in America* (Forsthoefel and Humes, 2005) brings together the work of ten scholars, focusing on nine important Hindu gurus. Each contributor addressed the religious and cultural interaction, translation, and transplantation that occur when gurus offer their teachings in America. The chapters also discuss the characteristics of each guru's teachings, the history of each movement, and the particular construction of Hinduism each guru offers. The American Academy of Religion continues to serve as a critical support network and avenue to invigorate and expand our research and our teaching.

The Long and Winding Road

In December 2004 I attended a conference, organized by Jeffrey Kripal among others, at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur. This gathering underscored profound changes in our field. "Exploring the Nature of Our Offense: A Symposium on the Study of Hinduism In a World of Identity Politics and Religious Intolerance" brought together scholars of India whose work had been subject to an increasing number of censorship campaigns from those who purported to find "defamation" or "blasphemy" in their writings.

The catalyst for my invitation was a paper I had given several weeks before at the AAR Annual Meeting about Rajiv Malhotra and his use of philanthropy to influence members of the academy (see next essay by Jack Hawley on page iii). Subsequently, I became the target of a barrage of Internet venom by colleagues of Malhotra. But the consequences occasioned by that presentation did not become the principal subject of my talk at the conference. Instead, after briefly recounting my own experience with Internet hate mail from complete strangers, I spent most of my time speaking for the first time in an academic forum about repercussions stemming from my 1995 essay, "Rajas, Thugs, and Mafiosos: Religion and Politics in the Worship of Vindhyavasini." This essay described insights drawn from my fieldwork about the temple priests, pundits, and shareholders of a temple site in India, where certain individuals functioned as what informants described as "mafiosos." Perhaps most remarkably, some of the most significant so-called mafiosos were prominent religious leaders at the temple: "shareholders" of the temple, who owned the proceeds of a day's offerings, and "temple priests," whose job was to mediate between pilgrims and the Goddess. In 1996, I was contacted by sources in India advising me that my essay had become known there. It was clearly conveyed to me that any further publications describing the violence or questionable economic activities among the religious leaders at the temple would occasion an undesirable response. At first I tried to remove anything about the political and economic dimensions (the manuscript was under contract with SUNY), but after nearly six months of effort at sanitizing, I realized those issues were at the heart of understanding anything meaningful about the religious leadership at the research site; the G-rated, inoffensive book was to me fundamentally dishonest.

I shared with others at the symposium that I had felt unmoored, silenced, and alone; I did not know any colleagues who had had similar experiences stemming from their research. Complicating my life was that I found that teaching about India sometimes triggered stress that exacerbated a chronic health problem. I came to realize that I would have to make a transition in both my research and teaching. Ultimately, I decided to continue to focus my research on Hindu religious leadership, but in a markedly different way. I shifted my focus away from a more anthropological approach of specific sites. I turned instead to the intersections of meditation, models of Hindu leadership independent of specific religious sites, and Hinduism in the West. These topics would not require visiting India again, had no associations to stress triggers, and as a long-time meditator, concentrating on the subject helped me to accept and even embrace the change.

My experience at the "Symposium on the Study of Hinduism in a World of Identity Politics and Religious Intolerance" affected me deeply. Beyond the feeling of relief in sharing my story with others who have faced similar situations, the sheer number of stories underscored again and again the truth that scholarship, teaching, and their implications are not decontextualized — people are involved, interests are involved, and what we do as scholars actually matters.

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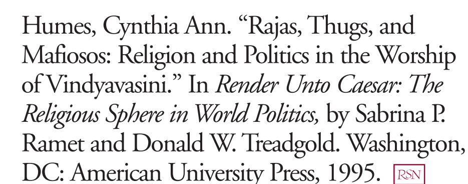

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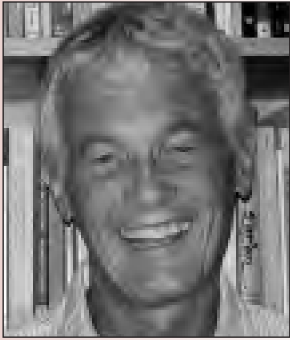
Hinduism Here

Jack Hawley, Barnard College, Columbia University



John Stratton Hawley is Ann Whitney Olin Professor of Religion at Barnard College, Columbia University. His recent publications include a revised edition of Songs of the Saints of India *(Oxford 2004, with Mark Juergensmeyer);* Three Bhakti Voices: Mirabai, Surdas, and Kabir in Their Time and Ours *(Oxford 2005); and* Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination *(Princeton 2005, co-edited with Kimberley Patton).*

IN 2003 I launched a course called "Hinduism Here," which benefited from an affiliation with The Pluralism Project founded by Diana Eck at Harvard. My goal was to help students explore religious institutions established by Hindus living in the greater New York area and to document them in a Web site that would be generally accessible. The course has been offered twice now, and the students' work is visible at *www.barnard.edu/religion/hinduismhere*. You can also access the material through The Pluralism Project's own Web site, *www.pluralism.org*.

In a class of this kind, vivid and open interactions with members of the communities being studied are essential. Especially since students were expected to produce text that would be publicly displayed, I took it as a cardinal commandment that members of the organizations with which they were interacting should also have their say. This meant, first of all, that the Web sites of the organizations themselves, if any such existed, would also be featured on ours. Second, we invited members of these communities to read the students' papers and respond to them if they chose to do so. This usually happened informally: participants' feedback was integrated into the papers themselves. Third, we planned the course so that it would culminate in a small conference to which members of the communities were eagerly invited and at which they spoke for themselves, often presenting perspectives different from those of the students. Finally, we invited representatives of the organizations under study to post any reactions on our course Web site.

In part because of this high level of engagement outside the classroom, however, it has also been very important for students to experience the classroom as a place where they can safely articulate their own ideas. Some of these ideas — perhaps evaluative, perhaps just questions and hypotheses — might not be ones the students would regard as appropriate for sharing with members of the communities they were studying. Many students in the course are Hindus themselves, yet that hardly makes them homogeneous or uncritical. Especially the first time around, there were huge arguments — often on points that the "Hindu Right" is eager to press — but that didn't compromise the safety of the classroom as a place where such arguments were expected to occur and didn't necessarily have to be solved.

What to do, then, when one of the organizations we were studying demanded entrance into the classroom space itself? The charge was essentially that students were being brainwashed, misled, and intimidated by their instructor — me.

This accusation was made by Rajiv Malhotra, the successful information technology entrepreneur who retired from his business involvements in 1994 to establish the Infinity Foundation. The Infinity Foundation describes itself high-mindedly as "making grants in the areas of compassion and wisdom," especially as these concern India and its civilization. At the same time, however, Malhotra also uses listservs, e-mails, and online forums such as *www.sulekha.com* to level vitriolic attacks against scholars whose work offends him, including Wendy Doniger, Jeffrey Kripal, Paul Courtright, and myself. (For details, see Hawley 2004.)

Malhotra has accused me in his Internet columns of being anti-Hindu; of steering all of my graduate students without exception toward Persian and Urdu — languages with Islamic overtones — and away from Sanskrit; and of being, in his words "white" — a person turned on by "a sort of voyeurism or subliminal conquest of the [nonwhite] other." Sanskrit, Malhotra explains on *www.sulekha.com*, "has been the traditional language for studying Indic religions." Speaking of me, Malhotra continues as follows: "Strategy: He hopes to train and deploy an army of desi sepoys equipped in the Persian–Urdu way of thinking, so that the next generation of Hinduism Studies scholars will be of that orientation." This charge is false. All the doctorate students with whom I have worked — without exception — have studied at least some Sanskrit; some are deeply proficient. Not all of them are studying Persian and Urdu, though I certainly encourage it where appropriate.

In 2003, when "Hinduism Here" was being offered for the first time, I felt it was our responsibility to represent something of the range of religious expression possible for Hindus living in New York. Most of the sites I had in mind were religious communities in the obvious sense — Hindu temples — but community centers and educational foundations are also important players, especially those with a presence on the Internet. So I proposed to Rajiv Malhotra and his colleagues at the Infinity Foundation (which, being headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey, is part of the orbit of greater New York) that their foundation itself should be one of the sites where our students would go to work. I was pleased when they accepted, especially since Malhotra's work had made it clear that university classrooms like ours were also places where Hinduism was being "produced" in ways that matter. The two-way mirror seemed just right.

Three students availed themselves of the chance to explore the Infinity Foundation — a master's student who has gone on to pursue a doctorate in religious studies, a doctoral student of Indian background in mechanical engineering, and an undergraduate majoring in Middle East and Asian languages and cultures at Columbia College. They began by traveling to Princeton as a group, and the first two, both men, largely accepted the foundation's idea of how its work could most appropriately be represented. The third, however, did not. This quiet, determined woman, an avid student of Foucault & Co., felt that greater independence was required if one was to understand how the power/knowledge syndrome might be at work here. As the course progressed, she gathered her thoughts in an excellent paper called "The Infinity Foundation and the Western Academy," and like others on her team, she agreed to show it to the Infinity Foundation along the way.

Not everything she said pleased Rajiv Malhotra. She began her first draft by describing what it was like to visit his home in Princeton — the foundation's office had been constructed in a separate building out back — and see what his wealth had made possible. That set off a series of alarms. How did she know how much money he made? She "never even asked us about any financials," he fumed in an April 23, 2003, e-mail communication to me. How could she say he was interested in exercising a certain form of power in the realm of knowledge? How could I allow such shoddy work? Actually, I was reading her draft at the same time the Infinity Foundation people were and had also asked her to spell out the basis of her claims. But as the Infinity Foundation's posting on the course Web site will show, they persisted in thinking that I was trying to dictate every word.

I believe the root issue was this student had said something about Malhotra's evident power base, in the form of his financial assets. Here was someone who needed to be a victorious warrior but at the same time a victim — a David, not a Goliath — and he didn't sound victim enough in her reporting. In response to both Malhotra's reactions and mine, she did reconsider her initial judgments as she shaped the essay into its final form, but she never gave up her critical frame, her focus on the connection between knowledge and power, not just in the case of the academy but also where the Infinity Foundation was concerned. One can see that in what she posted on the course Web site, and she was able to be even more candid in the version she submitted for internal consumption — for my eyes only, and hers.

The Infinity Foundation's objections to this paper were only part of a larger picture. They didn't like the idea of the course at all. Interested readers can review the full range of their objections by consulting what Krishnan Ramaswamy says by way of "Challenges to the Course" on the course Web site. But that kind of formal rebuttal seemed insufficient. Rajiv Malhotra made it clear that he wanted to visit the class personally. I discussed this with the students and they agreed, some with considerable reluctance.

When certain of our PhD students, especially those from Hindu backgrounds, caught wind of this, they were appalled. Was it not wrong to lend an air of academic credibility to a person and an organization they saw as overbearing, anti-academic, and most of all Hindu chauvinist? I saw their point, but persisted in thinking the greater danger would be to seem unwilling to receive them. I agreed with Malhotra that the old anthropological model of "fieldwork" with its "informants" left a lot to be desired: the field — if ever it was a field — has to be able to talk back to the city, especially in a course so city-based.

Sure enough, there were plenty of fireworks when Malhotra showed up in class, and it was interesting to see that he didn't come alone. He brought along two surprise guests, one an academic, the other a frequent reporter on "anti-Hindu" aspects of conferences held at places like Columbia. The numbers grew for other reasons, too. A researcher who had worked with one of our students on a yoga project asked to come, and so did one of our graduate students. She ended up becoming involved in a heated e-mail correspondence with Malhotra, and that generated further ripples of its own.

Would I do it all over again? Certainly. But I have learned something along the way. There is a real tension between the course's two goals — public service (student research published on a Web site) and intellectual formation (the shaping of that research through shared readings and classroom interchange). Both deserve their due. Organizations and communities that agree to play host to our students have a right to be represented publicly in ways that are palatable to their members, especially if they do not have the resources to mount Web sites themselves. (This is hardly the case for the Infinity Foundation, of course: its Web presence is massive, especially if you add in Malhotra's regular postings on *www.sulekha.com*.) On the other side of the ledger, students deserve a classroom environment that allows them to think for themselves without fear of intimidation. Nor should they feel their intellectual options narrowed by the need always to protect the groups they are studying.

To keep these public and private goals distinct, I emended the course requirements the second time I taught it. I created a new rubric on the Web site called "student portraits" — shorter statements about the groups they were studying than their term papers would be — and I explicitly required that they be discussed with the groups themselves. If in addition students wanted their longer papers to be considered for Web posting, I was glad to encourage that, but not if it meant the students felt they had to pull their punches. They had to be free to think, even if it meant that they did so strictly in-house. If they wanted to produce a separate, sanitized version for the Web, that was fine, and for most students there was nothing sensitive to be deleted in the first place. But I didn't want to publish on the Web anything that might seem offensive to the communities and organizations that had extended us their hospitality — not unless the students could make a compelling case that public criticism of this sort needed to be made. In any case, I reserved the right to exercise my own editorial control (subject, of course, to the authors' approval) and the organization's right to respond remained just that.

In saying all this, I have emphasized the distinction between public and private space, but I want to close by reporting that some of the most productive exchanges occurred on the line between the two, especially in the context of our course conference. One example comes vividly to mind. It concerned caste.

See **HAWLEY** p.vii

Cosmology Hopping: Engaging and Avoiding Controversy in the Religious Studies Classroom

Jennifer Rycenga, San José State University

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GROWING UP in American suburbia during the early 1960s, I presume I was among the last generation of girls to be advised that proper ladies never discuss politics, sex, or religion. This gender straitjacket never fit me: nowadays I spend my life discussing these three combustible topics! At San José State University, where I have taught since 1995, my regular courses include "Religion and Political Controversy," "Gender, Sexuality and Religion," "Religion in America," and "Pagan Traditions."

Focusing on controversial issues, though, need not create a combative classroom atmosphere. We've likely all had students who want to affirm the truth of their religion against (the clueless relativism of) the professor. What I've discovered is that if I've established strategies for classroom discussion, partisan students rile their classmates much more than they do me, and the resulting peer pressure generates valid discussion as a byproduct.

My favorite classroom pericope illustrating this occurred when I had read aloud a page of Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." An earnest young evangelical white man in the class (who had visited my office and thus knew that I was a "visible sinner" as an out lesbian), raised his hand the moment I asked for comments. "Even though it was you reading those words," he announced, staring accusingly at me, "I still felt convicted by them, guilty before my God!" This was much more confessional than I felt was appropriate, but before I could formulate a response, a tough young Chicana in the back nearly spat as she countered, "Oh, give me a break! That sermon does the same thing they did to us in basic training: make you feel worthless and weak, then when they pat you on the back, you're supposed to feel so grateful. I hate being used like that!"

This contrast opened a great discussion of emic and etic perspectives on Calvinist cosmology. Ultimately, both students knew their voices had been heard, but each was also able to go "cosmology hopping," and understand why their debate partner saw Edwards's tone as they did. I doubt that either the earnest evangelical or the jaded ex-military student had their minds (and judgments) changed, but their minds had grown (as well as others in that class, and the many other students with whom I have shared this story).

> *". . . you can loathe your neighbor's music, but the flourishing of your music does not depend on the silencing of his."*

On the first day of class I set the tone for what it means to discuss religion in a religious studies classroom. First, we won't pass judgment on truth claims. I'm not teaching to defend or debunk any one's truth claims in the religious studies classroom: we are there to understand the human sources and uses of religion, and the internal logic of religious systems as systems. Second, I make it clear that all religions look absurd from the outside, including one's own, and thus it is wise to refrain from judgmental terms such as "superstition," "extremist," and "fanatic," as they could just as easily be used against you. I've developed a helpful exercise to set the tone of the class for the first day in the "Religion in America" class.

Having presented them with a brief survey of the astounding range of religious diversity in North America, I ask them to reflect on some metaphors for adjudicating all these competing truth claims. Among the more extreme metaphors this exercise has elicited is the lottery model, which maintains that among a huge range of choices, there is still only one winning ticket, and you'd better find it. The chess game metaphor suggests there could be a variety of paths to the same goal; although there are many ways to get to checkmate, winning remains the soteriological goal, and losing a dreaded possibility. More inclusively, religious pluralism could be a hometown buffet of metaphysics: all is laid out for your eclectic choice or rejection. Finally, religious pluralism could be like eco-diversity, where the presence of many plants and animals makes a system viable (still leaving the option of pulling out weeds and invasives), meaning that diversity of opinion should not be reduced, but encouraged.

> *"I make it clear that all religions look absurd from the outside, including one's own . . ."*

Students enjoy this exercise, as they can indicate something of their religious perspective anonymously when discussing which metaphor strikes their fancy, without disclosing vulnerable religious identities. But what I most appreciate about it pedagogically is how the exercise decenters truth claims, a point I reinforce by offering my own metaphor of musical genres: you don't have to like all styles of music equally in order to study and understand their logic; the same holds true for religions in a religious studies classroom. Indeed, you can loathe your neighbor's music, but the flourishing of your music does not depend on the silencing of his.

Ultimately, though, two intangible factors explain my often disappointingly placid classrooms. First, as with most large state universities, at San José State, specific humanities courses are not usually required for all students, and when they are, there are so many different sections that students shop around; students can avoid professors who would challenge their views. How many students perceive me as too irreverent, and decide they needn't listen to an infidel all semester? Second, I find the general attitude of West Coast students to classroom discussion is accommodating rather than argumentative.

In a class "Spirituality and the Arts" that I taught at a Connecticut university, one student flatly declared that Adrienne Rich was a selfish woman who had left her husband for no good reason, and was therefore not deserving of our aesthetic attention. Other students in the class sensed an opportunity to debate, and leapt to it, constructing some defenses for Rich that were quite imaginative. Nothing so dramatically dismissive happens regularly in my California classroom; when some of my San José students raised important ethical queries around why the evangelical ghostwriter Mel White remained in a heterosexual marriage even when he knew he was gay, other students rushed to resolve the potential debate, neatly explaining his behavior as a product of different historical circumstances. This approach short-circuited a feminist critique of White's journey.

The vast majority of my students are more aggravated when I defend fundamentalism as an intellectual movement than when I present the thought of Maria Stewart or Mary Daly as central to American religious thought. The closing moments of "Religion in America" are often taken up with the story of Harry Hay being blessed by Wovoka in the late 1920s, auguring the rise of both gay rights and the American Indian Movement (Hay 1996, 17–33). I've never had a student protest this intersection as a fitting capstone for the course; on the contrary, many cite it on their finals as an intriguing springboard for reflection. However, I'll still be hearing from those same students that fundamentalism is anti-intellectual, no matter how often I have demonstrated to them that interpreting human reason as finite is hardly a thoughtless, antiphilosophic, or indefensible position.

Similarly, my maverick position on the nature/nurture debate over sexuality can make my LGBTQ students quite uneasy. I maintain that sexuality can be a choice (it can also be innate; this varies as do most human characteristics), and that the question of rights really concerns the social valuation of homosexuality. Once homosexuality is seen as a positive good, and therefore a positive choice, there will be no imperative to retreat from individual agency to what can be an apologetic appeal to biology.

Because the law in the United States protects both innate characteristics (e.g., no discrimination on the basis of race) and chosen characteristics (freedom of religion does not disappear even if one converts to different religions frequently), there is no logical reason for the LGBTQ movement to secure all its eggs in the precarious basket of biological determinism. When I explained this position at the end of a long class discussion on the nature/nurture debate (featuring the contrasting opinions of Mel White and Gloria Anzaldúa), a few gay male students were alarmed by my perspective. One who had once stubbornly insisted that sexuality was a biological given continued the discussion with me after class. He finally said, in frustration, that even though I might be right, I shouldn't voice such things publicly, because it could weaken gays politically.

> *"The chess game metaphor suggests there could be a variety of paths to the same goal; although there are many ways to get to checkmate, winning remains the soteriological goal, and losing a dreaded possibility."*

Controversy is where the intellectual excitement is, but it can also be a place of violence and danger. The religious studies classroom is one space where controversial issues can be aired as exercises in critical thinking, rather than as contests for eternal dominance. Different professors will create this arena for intellectual play in the manner most suitable for them.

I keep the ground rules clear: my classrooms are known as nonproselytizing zones. If something sounds too much like an unconditional endorsement, I'll ask that student to construct the counter-argument to what she just said. I also model this behavior when students see me arguing for the logical coherence of religious systems that would deny women education, or, in the case of Christian Reconstruction, have me executed. Ultimately, the ability to inhabit the cosmology of another, albeit provisionally, is the learned skill we give our students, one that will help them whether they become science fiction writers, missionaries, financial advisors, or saints.

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Teaching Religion in a Changing World That Needs Changing

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IT USED TO BE that my greatest challenges in teaching religion were: to convince agnostic students that whether or not God existed, religion still mattered; to convince the social scientists that religion was not just another aspect of culture; to convince the reductionists that religious experience was sui generis irreducible; to engage the apathetic ennui-laden perpetual-victims-of-impending-boredom idiot savants in an encounter with a world next door ever-so phantasmagoric and mind-absorbing as the latest release from Nintendo; and occasionally to remind the fundamentalists that they didn't know everything.

I was concerned with making students aware of the history of interpretation and the contemporary hermeneutical options, as well as the ambivalent, contradictory, and sometimes complementary paradigms that sift and shift through the multivalent religious traditions found in human culture. My courses were interdisciplinary, aimed for multicultural lucidity, and emphasized empathy and understanding of the other and cautiousness in interpretation of otherness. I thereby hoped to create an appreciation for the subtle, and to build an "ecosphere of the spirit" in the minds of my students that valued the quest for transcendence, human identity, purpose, and meaning within the traditions of humanity. Though my courses were primarily meant to serve as an initiation into the mysteries of the scientific study of religion, they could peripherally serve as an invitation to self-scrutiny and personal quest, but all within the safe boundaries of political correctness.

As I read it, PC was about finding ways to say everyone is right if only properly understood. This is how I used to interpret Eliade's injunction never to say of a religion something an adherent wouldn't sign. In other words, it seemed that the task was to help everyone put their best foot forward; manifest the best (perhaps hide the rest); exemplify the exemplary; sterilize negative stereotypes, and the like.

It is easy and tempting to thus present religion as a series of belles lettres, universal wisdom, and timeless truths. I no longer see this as my task. I now consciously struggle with the problem of how to straddle the phenomenological epochē of empathy and understanding with the enlightenment agenda of critique and world betterment through education. It is one thing to understand cannibalism and human sacrifice as exhibits of normative paradigms — that is, as products of well-wrought metaphysics and sophisticated theologies — but it is quite another thing to stand idly by as they are taking place.

I am now aware of dilemmas and tensions spanning theoretical and interpretive to pragmatic pedagogical concerns within our current academic and social milieu that have reached a crisis of urgency, and feel deeply the tension between the need for scholarship of religion to exercise on one hand epochē, and on the other critique. There are some particularly pressing issues between "understanding" and "explaining" religion. For example, how does the scholar address the often increasingly militant and seeming irrational stances of various "fundamentalisms" and other fixed-code intolerances within the context of the implied Enlightenment ideals of toleration and ecumenical respect? Such issues as the recent furor over images/caricatures of the Prophet, the radical re-dating of history by academic proponents of Hindutva, the creationist arguments for equal time in science classes, the increasing subsumption of religious studies into the social sciences, all reflect serious polemical, interpretive, and consequently pedagogical issues. These issues not only affect the application of our intellectual disciplines to "proper interpretation," that is, understanding of our subject matter, but to deeper issues of how we are going to move in and affect the world we have been given, as opposed to the world as teachers we need to help create.

Among the stickiest and most pervasive pedagogical challenges are those presented by fundamentalists in any variety of religion courses. Though I can empathize with much that is at the core of fundamentalist value systems, there is also much that is potentially detrimental to the welfare of human society as a whole. The increasingly stark direness of the either/or fundamentalist's inability to deal with shades of gray has led me to conclude that fundamentalists have what could be characterized as fundamental ideologically generated "learning disorders." I have labeled these disorders or syndromes as follows:

"Overall Fundamental Biblical Illiteracy" consists of strong opinions with very little actual biblical knowledge. "Pastor-Says Syndrome" is the overreliance on the cult of personality charisma, authority, and teachings of individuals who are often self-appointed and self-taught, or otherwise antischolarship. "Anachronic Dyslexia," or reading texts out of context and/or superimposing later theological developments on earlier historical strata, is often found together with "Critical Discernment Deficit": not knowing, for example, the differences of the genres within scripture, i.e., TaNaK, let alone textual and tradition strands within those divisions. "Leaping Logic Lesions" or grossly unwarranted conclusions based on the most meager of evidences or even silences is often compounded by "Messianic Myopia," the idea that no one but fundamentalists of the right sort are saved. Some students experience brain freeze, revealing symptoms of "Apocalyptic Apoplexy," "Nostalgia for Paradise Paralysis," and "Slippery Slope Finger Pointing Fixation," by which nonbelievers, sexually active singles, feminists, gays, nominal Christians, liberals, all Muslims, and, of course, backsliders are responsible for every ill in society from 9/11 to avian flu. Not least of all, "Proof-Text Tourette's Syndrome" can border on "Biblia-phrenia," the need to bombast and bombard someone with huge barrages of daisy-chained scriptures and "nothing but scripture," sort of *sola scriptura* with a vengeance.

"PC was about finding ways to say everyone is right if only properly understood."

These syndromes affect many well-meaning and otherwise intelligent students who have been rendered fixed-code in a world of shifting paradigms, one-size-fits-all in a world of polyvalent multiplicities, either/or in a world of neither/and, psychologically stunted and intellectually challenged. I could go on, but anyone who has taught "World Religions," or for that matter, "The Bible," knows exactly what I am trying to convey here. I want to emphasize that I treat these as learning disorders rather than full-blown pathological debilitations. This is important, since disorders can be compensated and overcome, but pathologies are generally terminal or, at worst, lethal. (I have long suspected that some fundamentalists and politicians have what I call "Armageddon Envy," meaning they want to see an apocalyptic eclipse of history in their lifetime and are quite consciously involved in the hermeneutics to make that happen. In his article titled "'End Times' Religious Groups Want Apocalypse Soon," *Los Angeles Times* staff writer Louis Sahagun wrote on June 22, 2006, that "'End times' religious groups want apocalypse sooner than later," with the "endgame" to "speed the promised arrival of a messiah.")

If these are fundamentalist learning disorders, what, then, are the assistive technologies to help overcome them? My medicine bag features *Argument, Analysis, Alternative Interpretation*, and *Anecdotes*. I think we have to engage fundamentalists on two areas that they take most seriously: the interpretation of scripture and the issue of "what would Jesus do." For the first we have to provide a more complete analysis of the conditions and context of scripture, the meaning and implications, and more thorough-going, compelling, and convincing arguments than received wisdom. For the second, we need to affirm that one cannot begin to know what Jesus would do in any contemporary circumstance till we properly understand what it is he actually did in his own historical circumstances. Fundamentalists need to be introduced to historical Jesus studies and the deep historiography and cross-discipline tools, strategies, methodologies, and consensus achieved by that ever-increasing endeavor.

We have a marvelous opportunity to engage students via the huge popularity of such phenomena as *The Passion of the Christ*, *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown 2003), and the recent publication of the lost Gospel of Judas. They provide what I like to call "the Pedagogical Payoffs of Pop Culture for the study of religion."

It strikes me as ironic that *The Passion of the Christ* would become such a blockbuster at the same time *The Da Vinci Code* book was on its ascendency. On one hand you had *The Passion*, the message of which one woman so aptly put as she shouted at the audience, "See how much he suffered for you!" and on the other, you had *The Da Vinci Code* which basically posits "See how much you have had to suffer for him and the church that co-opted him?" What delights me about the sudden popularity of these cultural foci is the opportunity to reemphasize some important scholarly achievements such as feminist scholarship provides, and to revive some works that have to an extent fallen by the wayside, such as William Phipps's 1970 book *Was Jesus Married? The Distortion of Sexuality in the Christian Tradition*, with its wealth of historical contextualization on the issue, or William Klassen's *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus?* (1996), which challenges traditional assumptions about the canonical textual evidence.

The ramifications of fundamentalism for the study of religion are serious and extensive. So let me conclude by saying that I have come to believe it is increasingly important to address the issues, not simply for the sake of solid intellectual achievement, but for the sake of the fundamentalist students themselves and the larger society as a whole. Perhaps the fate of the world is not at stake, but then again, it just might be.

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Orientalism and Islam in the Post-9/11 Classroom

Zayn Kassam, Pomona College

Zayn Kassam is Associate Professor and Chair of Religious Studies at Pomona College. She has won two Wig Awards (1998, 2005) for Distinguished Teaching at Pomona College, as well as the AAR's Teaching Excellence Award (2005). Her courses focus on Islamic philosophy, mysticism, gender and literature, and philosophical and mystical texts in comparative perspective. She has published articles on ethics and gender, and a textbook on Islam (Greenwood Press, 2006).

BEFORE 9/11, teaching Islam presented a challenge simply because of what Edward Said has termed Orientalism, that is, a view of Islam and Muslims so deeply entrenched in European and American culture that it is difficult to think of Islam or Muslims in a nonprejudicial manner. Said argues that European fears of increasing Muslim encroachment of Europe at the time of the Crusades, and later, the European desire to colonize Muslim regions of the world, led to the construction of an anti-Islamic discourse that was expressed in four ideas, which became part of the Western understanding of Islam and Muslims:

> Firstly, that there is an absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior.
>
> Secondly, that abstractions about the Orient are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities, thus rendering the Oriental passive, speechless, powerless, and requiring interpretation.
>
> Thirdly, that the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself: therefore it is assumed that a highly generalized and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically "objective."
>
> And finally, that the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared or to be controlled. (1979, 300–301)

The implicit presence of such ideas about Orientals, in this case Muslims, was and continues to be revealed in student discussions around issues they find highly problematic from a Christian and from a Euro-American perspective. So, for instance, they ask how could Muhammad claim to be a prophet and yet marry so many wives and participate in war? How could Muslims force women to veil and expect them to obey their husbands? Why aren't Muslim societies democratic, or conversely, why are Muslim regimes so despotic? Why don't the Palestinians understand that the Jews were there first? Why are there so many Muslim fundamentalists and militants? And the list goes on.

While such issues make class discussions quite spirited and interesting, I find that nearly the first half of a course on any Islamic subject is spent in drawing parallels to show that every major world tradition struggles with issues that from the outside appear irrational or inhumane. This situation has only been exacerbated by 9/11, as students fear that Muslims are irrational fanatics who blindly resort to wreaking violence on the innocent and the defenseless in their attempt to express hatred of America. Many students also feel that America has the responsibility, in the interests of building a safer world, to teach Muslim societies what democracy is about, and also to teach them how to treat their women better.

The goal of a liberal arts education is to facilitate critical thinking from an informed perspective, and to enhance the student's ability to address issues in complex and nuanced ways. I find it essential in all of my teaching to encourage students to explore multiple positions in examining a subject; although this is difficult at times, it is absolutely necessary if we want to educate future leaders who are informed, critical, and constructive in their thinking. Given the increasing role of Muslims in world events, it is vital to prepare our students by examining Orientalism and Islam in the post-9/11 classroom.

"*Utilizing the lens of a novel enables students to understand the many sides to the conflict, the lack of easy solutions, the terrible losses experienced on both sides, the different understandings of history by the Israelis and the Palestinians, and that this is not so much a conflict between faiths as it is a conflict over land and water and resources.*"

Instead of bowing to the temptation to become defensive in the classroom, I take my cue from Edward Said and attempt to let the Oriental — in this case the Muslim — speak for him or herself in the readings I assign for class. For instance, in "Muslim Literary Landscapes," a freshman critical inquiry seminar, students will read all of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, or *Culture and Imperialism*, alongside six novels written by Muslims from different parts of the globe. This approach allows the student to connect, through the lens of a literary work, to multifaceted issues. Through the empathetic bridging that is possible — in hearing a character speak, in being presented with characters who love, suffer anguish and abandonment, who dream and hope, who live in political and social realities that they bring alive to us — students are able to see the deleterious effects of colonization on many of the Muslim (and now European) societies that are producing fundamentalists and militants today. They also learn from the diverse voices presented through different characters that Muslims are not uniform in how they address challenges.

So, for instance, the novel *Wild Thorns* by Palestinian author Sahar Khalifeh takes the reader into the mind and logic of a suicide bomber. Khalifeh introduces multiple voices into her narrative in the form of characters who draw out for us how Israeli political and military decisions are experienced by Palestinians, and how they are in fact differently experienced. Utilizing the lens of a novel enables students to understand the many sides to the conflict, the lack of easy solutions, the terrible losses experienced on both sides, the different understandings of history by the Israelis and the Palestinians, and that this is not so much a conflict between faiths as it is a conflict over land and water and resources.

I can now expect to see 50 students on the first day of my "Women in Islam" class in contrast to the 9 or 10 that showed up ten years ago. Here, too, I utilize Muslim sources to allow students to assess for themselves what is going on with Muslim women. We read from the Qur'an to find out what in fact it has to say about women. We learn that the Qur'an considers men and women perfectly equal in the eyes of God in terms of their ethical, moral, and religious responsibilities; that women were given rights such as maintenance after divorce, and inheritance rights long before such rights were given to women in Europe or America. We read Muslim female authors on how the Qur'an was interpreted by male Muslim scholars: often, to the detriment of women. As with every course on gender, we read some feminist theory to understand what patriarchy is and how historically it has played a role in every major religious tradition to curtail the rights and freedoms of women and to construct social roles for women as a result of their biology.

We read literary works by Muslim women to see how they articulate and experience restrictions in their lives, and how they take control of their lives in ways that are at times subversive, at times quite bold. We learn that the veil is the least of their worries even though we in the West are fixated upon the veil as a sign of Muslim male oppression of women. Instead, we learn among other things, first, that both men and women in Muslim societies are oppressed by political dictatorships (and often propped up by Western interests). Second, that they suffer the economic impoverishment of globalization that furthers the turn to an Islamist, or what we call fundamentalist Islam, in the hopes that creating an Islamic society governed by Islamic principles of social justice presents a viable alternative to their current governments. Third, we learn that Muslim societies grapple with the attempt to restore a sense of pride in their culture in the face of Western cultural, economic, and military hegemony that has consistently sent the message, at least since colonization, that all the backwardness in Muslim societies is due to their faith and culture, rather than due to the very real material conditions in which they live.

All three factors — political dictatorships, globalization, and Western hegemony with its concomitant unequal power relationships with Muslim societies — have led many Muslims to question whether the wholesale adoption of Western culture provides the answer to their problems. Indeed, many Muslims conclude that they have to find solutions that are sensitive to their own cultural, historical, political, social, and economic contexts, and since Islam is both a culture and a religion, it is not surprising to find Muslims using language that draws upon the rich heritage of Islamic civilization, and by extension, religion.

"*We learn that the veil is the least of their worries even though we in the West are fixated upon the veil as a sign of Muslim male oppression of women.*"

The point of such discussions in my classes is not to brainwash students into agreeing with the most strident voices emerging from Muslim societies, but rather to help students critique the many differing Muslim points of view, because through understanding can come the possibility of working in partnership rather than in antagonism. Students see that one cannot talk about the liberation of Muslim women without addressing the profound challenges facing Muslim societies in a world in which their culture is ignored, if not devalued, in our pursuit of the resources that are found in their parts of the globe, resources that are necessary for propping up our own lifestyles, and our economic survival.

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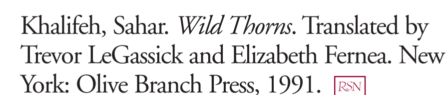

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The Problem of Pluralism: Teaching Islamic Diversity

Vernon James Schubel, Kenyon College

Vernon James Schubel is Professor of Religion at Kenyon College. His research interests include Islam in South and Central Asia and Anatolia. His book Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam *(1993) is on Muharram observances in Pakistan. His recent research has focused on the reemergence of the Sufi tradition in the former Soviet Union and on the Alevi-Bektashi tradition in Turkey.*

EXPOSING STUDENTS to the academic study of Islam for the first time is simultaneously thrilling and daunting. Over the years my classes have included both Muslim and non-Muslim students. In each case the challenge is different. Most of my non-Muslim students have come to learn about an "alien" religion with which they have little actual familiarity. For these students the initial task is to get them to look beyond the variety of stereotypes that they may hold about Islam, especially in the post-9/11 context. Among the most common of these stereotypes is the notion that Islam is a relatively univocal tradition; a simple and legalistic monotheism that has remained relatively unchanged until confronted by the rise of modernity and the subsequent rise of European hegemony.

Muslim students come to the academic study of Islam with greater familiarity, however their knowledge is often rooted in particular cultural and theological understandings, making it difficult to take seriously the religiosity of Muslims who practice differently. With various forms of salafi Islam gaining currency in college and university environments, my pedagogy has often involved getting my Sunni Muslim students to accept the necessity of grappling with Shi'i and Sufi Islam as legitimate modes of Muslim piety. A central goal of my teaching is to get both Muslim and non-Muslim students to recognize the sheer fact of an inherent and vibrant pluralism of the Islamic tradition.

By pluralism I refer not only to the remarkable linguistic and cultural pluralism of the Muslim world, but also its spiritual and theological diversity evident in numerous manifestations and expressions of piety — from Shariah-minded ritual practice, to Sufi dhikr and pilgrimage, to Shi'i commemorations of martyrdom. An appreciation of that diversity is central to any complete understanding of Islam and its history. Thus I begin my discussion of Islam not with religious law and ritual practice, but instead with essential beliefs shared by all Muslims.

It is not surprising that I would take this approach. As an undergraduate, I took a course on South Asian religions in which our discussion of Islam focused on the Sufi tradition. I remember vividly images of the *urs* celebrations at the tomb of Muinuddin Chishti, which led to my lifelong fascination with Sufi pilgrimage and "popular" Islam. I also took courses on Islam that, among other things, introduced me to the little-known world of the Ismaili Muslim tradition. At graduate school, I studied the complexities of Twelver Shi'ism and spent the following years doing extended periods of research in Pakistan and Uzbekistan studying aspects of the Sufi and Shi'i traditions. For the last ten years I have been involved in the study of the Turkish Alevi tradition.

> *"From the start, I never learned the Sunni legal tradition as the norm — the "straight path" to which one can compare the "less orthodox" Sufi and Shi'i traditions."*

I present this intellectual autobiography because I feel it has been essential to my understanding of Islam as a pluralistic tradition. From the start, I never learned the Sunni legal tradition as the norm — the "straight path" to which one can compare the "less orthodox" Sufi and Shi'i traditions. For me, Shariah-minded Sunni Islam is simply one very important manifestation of Islamic piety among many. Thus I want to instill in my students the essential understanding that the various Sufi and Shi'i movements within Islam do not see themselves as "heterodox" or peripheral. Their adherents view them as valid responses to the spiritual challenge presented by the Qur'an and the Prophet.

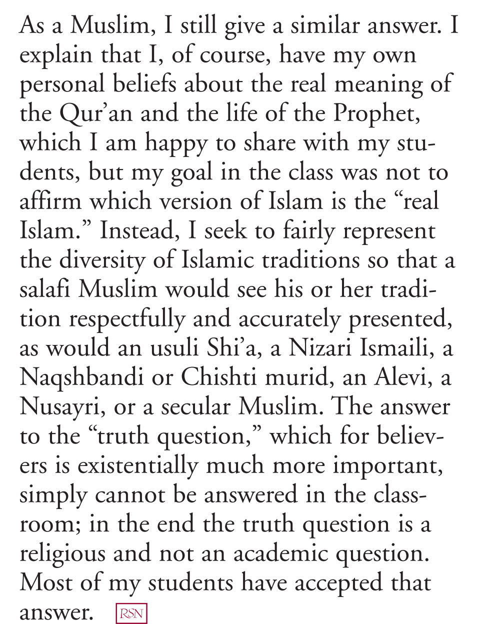
On the first day of my classes, I begin by comparing Islam to a tree and noting that every tree has both roots and branches. The branches are theology and law which depend for their existence upon the roots. These latter are the *usul al-din*, the roots of religion. The three roots shared by Sunni and Shi'a alike are: *Tauhid* (Belief in the Unity of God), *Nubuwwat* (Belief in Prophets) and *Qiyamat* (Belief in the Day of Judgment). I use the *usul al-din* as the organizing principle of all of my introductory discussions on Islam, because the varieties of Islamic belief and practice are rooted in differing interpretations of these concepts.

Tauhid is the central tenet of Islam. For all Muslims "there is no god, but God." However, interpretations of *tauhid* run the gamut from the strict monotheism associated with Ibn Taimiyyah, who argues for an utter distinction between the Creator and creation, to the mystical vision of *tauhid* associated with Hallaj and Ibn al-Arabi that sees a unity of being (*wahdat al-wujud*) between God and the universe.

Nubuwwat means belief in prophets, especially the Prophet Muhammad to whom the Qur'an was revealed. Some Muslims, particularly those associated with the salafi and wahabi traditions, emphasize the utter distinction between God and the Prophet. They see his primary role as a messenger and deliverer of the Qur'an. More mystical traditions, however, see Muhammad as the manifestation of a primordial light (*nur*) that is the origin of all creation and emphasize the intense love of God for the Prophet, who is defined as Habibullah (the beloved of God) who should be loved as evidence of one's love for God. This has always been an essential aspect of so-called "popular Islam." It is most fully expressed in the traditions of Shi'ism and Sufism where devotion to the Prophet is extended to those who are his legitimate descendants. Thus, for Sufis and Shi'i Muslims respectively, devotion to the pirs and imams becomes an essential aspect of Muslim piety.

Finally, *Qiyamat* refers to the Day of Judgment and the corollary belief that human beings are morally responsible beings who will be held accountable for their actions before God. For some Muslims the belief in the Qiyamat demands a literal understanding of the descriptions of Paradise and Hell that one finds in the Qur'an. For others these descriptions are symbolic of the bliss of eternal proximity to and the agony of eternal separation from God. More mystically the Alevi tradition sees heaven and hell as eternally present among us in the here and now.

The point I try to make to my students is that the myriad expressions of Islamic piety — from the recitation of the Qur'an to the practice of the five pillars of Islam, to recognizing and giving allegiance to the living Imam of the Age, to participation in Sufi pilgrimage and *dhikr* — should be seen as responses to these essential but multivocal beliefs. Our challenge in the academic study of Islam is not to decide which of these responses are the correct ones, but rather to understand the variety of those responses and the arguments made for them by their practitioners.



Of course my students have often asked, "Which is the real Islam?" Before I became a Muslim myself, I responded by asking, "Do you really want a non-Muslim white guy deciding which Islam is the 'real' Islam intended by God and the Prophet Muhammad? After all, Muslims of good faith have argued about this for nearly 1,400 years. Should I presume to settle those arguments? Our task is to look at the variety of answers given by Muslims over time."

As a Muslim, I still give a similar answer. I explain that I, of course, have my own personal beliefs about the real meaning of the Qur'an and the life of the Prophet, which I am happy to share with my students, but my goal in the class was not to affirm which version of Islam is the "real Islam." Instead, I seek to fairly represent the diversity of Islamic traditions so that a salafi Muslim would see his or her tradition respectfully and accurately presented, as would an usuli Shi'a, a Nizari Ismaili, a Naqshbandi or Chishti murid, an Alevi, a Nusayri, or a secular Muslim. The answer to the "truth question," which for believers is existentially much more important, simply cannot be answered in the classroom; in the end the truth question is a religious and not an academic question. Most of my students have accepted that answer. RSN

HAWLEY, from p.iii

Rajiv Malhotra has joined many other Indian Americans — and scholars too — in trying to get their fellow countrymen to see India through some other lens than that of "the caste system." He argues that caste has no place in a discussion of Hinduism on two grounds — first, because to talk of caste is to talk sociology, not religion; and second, because there was never any such thing as caste in the first place. It's just a colonial misperception, a European invention. I don't entirely accept either point, but that's neither here nor there.

Caste came up at our conference in presentations about the Ravidas Sabha of Queens, since its members come primarily from the "lower" echelons of Indian society as ranked by caste. Responding to this, some of the young men who'd come from the Ravidas Sabha spoke movingly about their struggles against caste prejudice, sometimes in rather hesitant English. They were quickly taken to task by Infinity Foundation associates and sympathizers: "Don't you know there is no such thing as caste? You should get this out of your thinking." As for the Ravidasis, they had lived with this thing called caste, and no one was going to tell them they hadn't.

I was proud that our course made this sort of exchange possible, and made it safe for both sides. These groups, vastly different in background and perspective, were evidently encountering each other for the first time. They went at it with great energy, not just while I tried to moderate but on their own as soon as there was a break in the program. Their fundamental disagreement made it impossible to go on thinking that the great divisions fell squarely between "the academy" and "the community," between outsiders and insiders. After all, who's inside? That's what the Ravidasis had been struggling with for centuries.

Every step we took in "Hinduism Here" revealed that things are more complex, more interesting, and more porous than we might have thought. Some of this porousness means that holes have to be plugged and dikes built. Students have to have a place to talk and communities have the right to self-representation. But for the rest, porousness is a very good thing.

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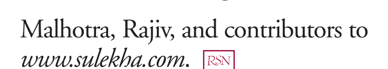

Difficult Knowledges: Sexuality, Gender, Religion

Susan E. Henking, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

Susan E. Henking is Professor of Religious Studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and founding editor of the AAR/OUP series "Teaching Religious Studies." Her teaching and research focuses on gender and sexuality, social scientific theories of religion, and secularization. She co-edited Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology *(1997) with Gary David Comstock. Together with Diane Jonte Pace and William Parsons, she is co-editor of the forthcoming* Mourning Religion.

IT IS NOVEMBER 2004 and as I walk into the classroom, I am certainly not cheerful. But I am not expecting sobbing. And, that is exactly what I heard — and saw — when I reached the seminar table. The 16 of us were used to the acoustics of the room, the blackboard's awkward tendency to move when written on, even the brass door midway up the back wall. What we were not used to was the sight and sound of a young man crying. In this moment in a course entitled "Que(e)rying Religious Studies," the heart of education was rendered momentarily visible.

As I reflect on that moment months later, I realize that the memory exemplifies what Deborah Britzman (1998; 2003) has called "difficult knowledge" — knowledge that challenges the framing of education as progress or development; knowledge that is more than merely cognitive, more than merely experiential or conscious; knowledge that "interferes." For the students — and for myself as teacher — the classroom opened out to make analyzable what we (as teachers and students schooled in how to act and, indeed, be within the settings of higher education) suppress, ignore, even repress. The tears were polyvalent, revealing the effort to be gay and lesbian positive amidst the miseries of everyday life, as well as the clash between desires for knowledge to move us and the puzzle of what to do when it does so in unexpected ways. Much of the educational force of that moment for me is occurring later — in what Britzman labels (following Freud) "after-education." (Britzman 2003). I feel as though I have looked at this — and forgotten it — many times before. The moment reveals education as, according to Freud, an "impossible profession" — where learning to love and loving to learn (Britzman 1998) are entangled with resistance and a "passion for ignorance," where education is contradictory at its very heart. Here there is an echo of comments on the unspeakability of education (Griffin 1992) and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's (1992, 1) questions: "Is there a relation between crisis and the very enterprise of education? . . . Is there a relation between trauma and pedagogy?"

The Course:

"Que(e)rying Religious Studies" is a 200-level religious studies course, cross-listed with women's studies and lesbian, gay, bisexual studies at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. At the top of the syllabus for fall 2004, I wrote:

> What do religion and sexuality have to do with each other? This course considers a variety of religious traditions with a focus on same-sex eroticism. In the process, students are introduced to the fundamental concerns of the academic study of religion and lesbian/gay/queer studies. Among the topics considered are the place of ritual and performance in religion and sexuality, the construction of religious and sexual ideals, and the role of religious formations in enforcing compulsory heterosexuality.

Beneath this rather dull opening follows a list of (too many) books, assignments, and office hours. Organized in a quite recognizable genre, the syllabus reveals that on that November day, we were somewhere between Mark Jordan's *The Silence of Sodom* and Kelly Brown Douglas's *Sexuality and the Black Church*. Somewhere between Catholicism and race, between silence and sexuality, between illusion and disillusionment.

Any course is, though, much more than the syllabus. It is a community of inquiry and of accountability. It is the conversations that emerge, the actions that happen, the psychic events that take place, the papers to write and/or grade, and the letters that appear years later on transcripts or in my mailbox (literal or virtual). Courses are, in many ways, the tangents we take — those that seem to avoid but work in the interest of education. And they are, in fact, moments in time that become (we hope) moments in memory.

The Moment, Then and Now:

More than just an ordinary day in November, this memorable Wednesday was the morning after the 2004 United States elections. In addition to the presidential election results, students were still absorbing news that 11 states had passed referenda "against" gay marriage. We were disproportionately gay/lesbian and almost 100 percent "gay positive" or allies. (Why does that matter, I wonder now?) I was, myself, distraught at the reelection of a Republican administration as well as the results of the various referenda. I had watched throughout the campaign with horror as Republicans marshaled overtly anti-gay/lesbian tactics, entangled with particular understandings of religion and morality, toward their ends. I had been hurt when left-leaning acquaintances saw the gay issue as a distraction from what really mattered.

I was distraught. But not, I have to admit, surprised. It felt more to me like déjà vu than surprise — the stresses of visible gay and lesbian lives read as "progress" contradicted by the results of the referenda echoed earlier contradictions I had witnessed across the decades. What was more surprising to me was the student dismay, a reaction to what they eventually described as "unbelievable." I was unprepared, that is, to see that this was their first visible challenge to hope — a challenge students in both classes had, perhaps, not recognized before, but that was not new. The sense of trauma was palpable. All their education — including this course — did not prepare them for this vicissitude of everyday life. My surprise emerged, Britzman teaches me, from the ways the noise of sobbing interfered — simultaneously recalling my younger self and differing so much from my early-twenty-first-century teacherly self, challenging the construal of education as information and distanciation through intellectualization evident in my syllabus, facing me with the reiteration of something I learned before and did not want to learn.

> *"What is the place of tears in teaching and learning?"*

Even in November 2004, "Que(e)rying Religious Studies" was about return: I had taught the course twice before. And I had learned how difficult it was before. After the second time, I posted the syllabus on line. (See *www.aarweb.org/syllabus/browse.asp.*) My remarks, then, were simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar when I reread them recently:

> The teaching of a course at the intersection of lesbian/gay/queer studies and religious studies poses some special challenges. Like many such interdisciplinary offerings (e.g., women and religion), students sometimes enroll in the course with preparation in one area and not the other. In addition, students who enroll in a course on this topic often have experiential or existential reasons for being there which can pose a variety of problems — ranging from "I am X so I do not need to read about X" to emotional difficulties with material. Current events and the cultural location of religion and sexuality at any given moment seem also to shape the course; thus, the first time I offered it (about 5 years ago) all students began with the notion that religion and homosexuality were hostile to one another. In 2003, my students all assumed that they were congruent initially. In any case, the course tries to offer a critical introduction to religious studies (understood as a non-theological approach to the study of the human, cultural phenomenon of religion) and to lesbian/gay/queer studies (understood as focusing on the social construction of sexualities) and to the ways these two topics are related in our time. It is an exciting course to teach; and it is sometimes painful. But, given the centrality of sexuality in many of the most heated disputes about religion these days, it seems an important way to help students think intellectually about some things that our culture may be teaching them are outside of the realm of intellectual reflection.

Getting Specific

What is a difficult topic? My initial ideas (in a sort of free association) were: a complex topic, a hard topic, an uncomfortable topic, a resistant student, an emotionally laden topic, a politically loaded topic. Hard topics led me to gendered knowledges: hard subjects and soft ones. The conjunction of Britzman's work with a young man's tears, though, leads elsewhere — to a depth of psychological wondering about education as symptom, to the dream of religious studies and the repetition compulsions that we embody as its practitioners. While Britzman's discussions of psychoanalysis and education raise innumerable questions about education's relations to gender and sexuality, her work does not (as far as I know) touch on religion. And yet, as Judith van Herik (1985) made clear years ago, psychoanalysis is entangled with religion — both its enactments and its repudiation. So, too, is education entangled with religion, historically and in the present, globally and in the United States. (See Henking.) By turning my teacherly eye to psychoanalysis, Britzman leaves me with new questions about the implications of her work for teaching religion, teaching religious studies.

As I write this essay, I think about topics I do not want to teach but feel obliged to teach. Those are the truly difficult topics *for me* and I wonder if this is narcissism. Where does the difficulty lie — in the students, in the subject matter, in me, in the spaces between? And how do we ensure that education is not merely repetition, but truly works through (pace Freud) us all to enable us to live the misery of everyday life in hope? What happens when religious studies meets lesbian/gay/queer studies? What is the place of tears in teaching and learning?

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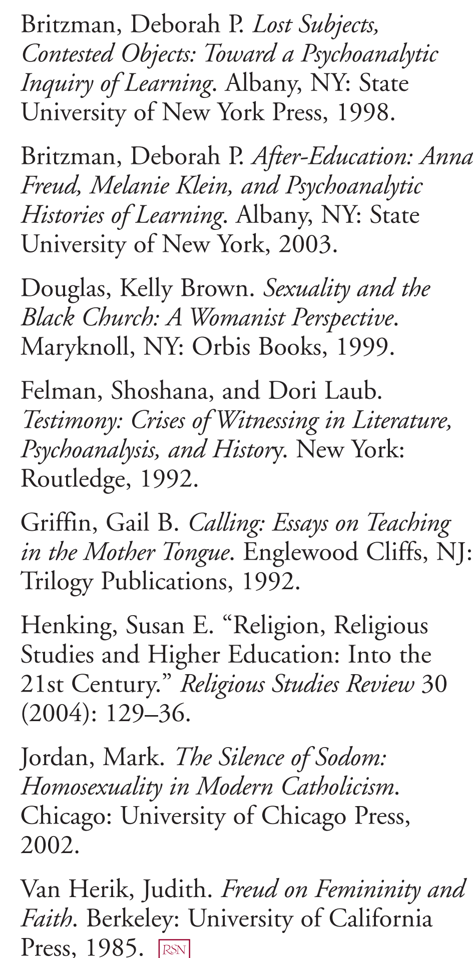

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Teaching, Voic(ing), Silenc(ing): Toward a Polyglot Pedagogy

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Robert Maldonado is Professor of Philosophy at California State University, Fresno. His research interests focus on autobiographical hermeneutics and the use of the Bible in Latin American identity. Since becoming chair of his department in 1998, he mostly teaches "Literature of the Bible" and occasionally courses on Tolkien and philosophy of science and religion.

MY RECENT RESEARCH explores the dynamics of silence and voice in the Gospel according to Mark, raising questions of ownership (who has a voice and who does not) and questions of power (who controls voice — one's own or others' — and who cannot). My concern with questions of power and ownership around voice stem from several interconnected reasons. I grew up in a first-generation United States family. My brother and I learned English as a first language. We acculturated into middle-sector Anglo culture from a working-class background. I have light skin. Throughout my formative academic study, my Latin-American heritage and its voices were irrelevant.

After a brief sojourn teaching at an elite liberal arts college, I secured my current teaching position at California State University, Fresno, a working-class public university in the great Central Valley. White students make up 37–44 percent of the student body and women 60 percent; almost half are first-generation college students. Students in Fresno Unified School District speak 101 languages. According to the U.S. Census, more than one-fifth of the region's population lives below the poverty level. With this linguistic, ethnic, and class diversity comes considerable religious diversity, but the region also represents California's Bible Belt. Higher education professionals often talk about the value of diversity and simultaneously lament its absence in most colleges; few professors actually live and work within such a diverse environment as Fresno.

Given how my own and my people's voices have been silenced historically, I am sensitive to issues of voice and silence, both mine and that of my students. I want to ensure my classroom becomes a space in which each student's voice is valued. I am aware of the power and privilege that the institution grants me as professor in terms of classroom dynamics. Yet frankly, at times I want to silence some of those who expect class to be nothing different from Bible studies at their church, and uncomfortable confrontations do sometimes happen. In spite (or because?) of this, I am committed to the progressive pedagogy model of Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1970), which emphasizes dialogue and concern for the oppressed.

Attending to who is speaking and who is not is a step, but it is a dependent step; noticing who has a voice or not is first contingent on hearing and position. If the failure to hear has little consequence, it reveals the power of the person failing to hear. Position is also a function of community; one may have freedom or power to exercise voice within one's group, family, or community, but elsewhere that same person may be silent or silenced.

Silence and voice can thus have different values. For example, the use of voice to silence another may be negative if it seeks to stifle the other. On the other hand, silence can be an intentional strategy to resist the eliciting of a co-opted voice. Thus, silence, like voice, can be imposed or voluntary. Not all silence/ing is bad; not all voice/ing is good. More inquiry into the context, extent, and purpose is needed to determine value.

My "New Testament" class is made up of conservative Protestants, Catholics for whom the Bible is a non-Western text, members of various other religions, as well as nonreligious and even antireligious students. Both literature majors and philosophy/religious studies majors enroll in it. Negotiating the content — let alone the issues of silence and voice — is to walk a pedagogical razor's edge. Strategies aimed at opening up one segment of the class can work against opening up other groups. Sometimes I deliberately silence students so that others might speak, yet I confess that at times I also silence students from frustration or anger. At times, I worry that my attempts to elicit voice from some silent students might themselves be part of a complex dynamic in which my coaxing paradoxically accomplishes the opposite intention by rendering their voices less authentic, less "theirs." I wonder: do they lie or misrepresent their voice out of fear of a lower grade?

I see parallels between my pedagogy and research. The Gospel according to Mark exhibits different examples of silence and voice. Some characters silence others; some ask questions to elicit a response from the silent, and some choose to remain silent in response to probing questions. Motives are not always explicit. Just like many of my students, some characters in the Gospel have little to say. Jesus appears to talk the most, yet the truly dominant voice is often unnoticed; Jesus is allowed less than three-eighths of the words in the Gospel, and totaled together, all the other characters combined get less than one-eighth. Thus over half the Gospel is literally in the voice of the narrator, Mark, and in an important sense, all of the words — even those he cites — are his, for it is he who has selected which quotes to include or exclude, which voices to privilege or to silence.

Mark uses two different verbs for silencing depending on the subject and object. When Jesus silences demons, he rebukes them (1:25; 3:12; 4:39; 9:25). When he silences humans, he orders them (5:43; 7:36; 9:9). Silencing demons tends to succeed; silencing humans does not. The one time Jesus rebukes a human it is Peter, with both trying to silence the other (8:30, 32f). There are only two places where humans are the subject of "rebuking" other humans (10:13, 48). Jesus's rebuke of Peter (as demon) becomes a bad model for the disciples to treat other humans as demonic rather than the more limited case of ordering others to be silent.

There are several ways these instances of silencing in Mark pertain to the classroom. One model is the more tempting and perhaps even "natural," which is for the professor to cast him- or herself into the role of Jesus, whether consciously or unconsciously. Jesus is a Power, the Teacher is a Power. It is perhaps no coincidence that with just a single exception of Jesus's self-reference in the third person, every instance of Jesus being referred to as "the Teacher" is within a context in which the character is misunderstanding Jesus. Thus, the depiction of Jesus as "Teacher" in Mark reveals an irony that illustrates the failure to learn. To model oneself on Jesus as Power, as the Teacher, would instead cast us into the role of the flummoxed disciples, i.e., unwittingly rebuking other human beings because we presumptively think we know how things should be understood or what should be done. Along the way, we end up teaching that such rebukes of others are appropriate and to be expected. We inadvertently become poor models of silencing. This emerges in the context of failed voices (mine and my students) in the classroom, strategic silences as responses to attempted eliciting of voice, with others resisting all the more loudly from being demonized. At the same time, one can say that the demonic can get instantiated in, for example, patriarchy and racism, whose institutions and structures render some people without voice and others with excess voice deserving of rebuke.

In an important sense, Mark is not an individual exerting power over the narrative; rather, the author is a community. The story emerges from a community, out of its needs, concerns, and values, and speaks back to that context. If this analysis has any merit, it suggests that Mark's community implicitly or explicitly attended to the dynamics of silence and voice via the characterizations in the Gospel. It is the whole of the community that corresponds to the whole of the story.

My view is that the voice in the classroom should be more like Mark, the community. As a community together, the classroom should attend to the dynamics of silence and voice, recognizing the debilitating effects of racism, patriarchy, and classism, and responding together to the liberating potential of learning through dialogue with respect. I try to use my patriarchal privilege to opt out of patriarchal privilege: it is my responsibility to build the conditions of a participative community wherein all class members may engage in dialogue, share authentically based on lived experience, and through this process develop a consciousness with the power to transform their reality. It is such a community that should silence the demons of racism, patriarchy, and classism, not the privileged few or the one. It is such a community that should elicit expressions of voice (and silence) from its members, not the privileged few or the one.

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PAST *SPOTLIGHT ON TEACHING* TOPICS

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October 2004	Teaching with Site Visits
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November 1992	General Issues of Teaching Religious Studies

Teaching "Native American Religions" in Central New York

Philip P. Arnold, Syracuse University

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WHEN I BEGAN teaching at the University of Missouri in Columbia in 1990, the prevailing wisdom in the academy was to avoid teaching "Native American Religions." It was regarded as professional suicide for a nonnative, white male to commit their research and teaching to this contentious and controversial area of religious studies. So far as I can tell, this attitude still prevails. But, even then, I understood the contentiousness of Native American religions to be an indication of its importance. My "Native American Religions" brings an awareness to students of the traumatic and turbulent nature of American culture like no other class of mine. In 1996 my family and I moved to Syracuse University, which is in the heart of Haudenosaunee country. This move changed everything; my "Native American Religions" class, by virtue of our physical location, makes the subject matter immediately relevant and urgent.

Syracuse University is located five miles north of the Onondaga Nation. Onondaga is symbolically the Central Fire of the Haudenosaunee. The Haudenosaunee are the "People of the Longhouse," more generally known as the "Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy," consisting of the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora Nations. The shore of Onondaga Lake is the site where the Confederacy was founded; three men joined together there and convinced the Haudenosaunee to dedicate themselves to the Great Law of Peace by throwing their weapons of war into the roots of the Great Tree of Peace. Of the 563 tribal entities recognized by the U.S. federal government today, only three are still governed by their ancient ceremonial systems. All three are Haudenosaunee, and one of these is the Onondaga Nation. Onondaga territory is still controlled by the Longhouse system of government. All Longhouse people at the Onondaga Nation hold their clan through their mother. Male chiefs are "raised" through their matrilineal clans by Clan-mothers. The Haudenosaunee system of governance impressed and influenced the "Founding Fathers" of the United States Constitution, as well as the women in the 1840s at Seneca Falls who contributed to the Women's Movement.

Most Haudenosaunee nations have filed "land-claims" throughout upstate New York, including the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga, and Oneida. Since the mid–1970s "Indian land-claims" have come to dominate local media attention, if not the attention of national and international media. There has been an intensely negative reaction among nonnative residents of New York to these actions — nothing in American culture raises controversy faster than contestation of land title. But the Onondaga historic "Land Rights" action on March 11, 2005, was completely unique, for it is based in the traditional values of the Longhouse tradition: peace, justice, and environmental healing of the land, particularly Onondaga Lake, which is simultaneously the site of the indigenous root of democracy AND the most polluted lake in the United States. Although the Onondaga action is based in the same legal history as the actions of other Haudenosaunee nations, rather than a monetary settlement, or one that includes a casino deal with the state, the Onondaga Nation instead seeks to restore the integrity of the environment: it seeks to restore Creation to a pristine state — hence the emphasis on "land rights" as opposed to "land-claims." As the preamble of its legal action states:

> The Onondaga people wish to bring about a healing between themselves and all others who live in this region that has been the homeland of the Onondaga Nation since the dawn of time. The Nation and its people have a unique spiritual, cultural, and historic relationship with the land, which is embodied in *Gayanashagowa*, the Great Law of Peace. This relationship goes far beyond federal and state legal concepts of ownership, possession, or other legal rights. The people are one with the land and consider themselves stewards of it. It is the duty of the Nation's leaders to work for a healing of this land, to protect it, and to pass it on to future generations. The Onondaga Nation brings this action on behalf of its people in the hope that it may hasten the process of reconciliation and bring lasting justice, peace, and respect among all who inhabit this area." (*Onondaga Nation v. New York State*, Civil Action No. 05-CV-314)

Because of the strong values of environmental healing, several non-Haudenosaunee people — including myself — have become motivated to promote the Onondaga Land Rights action. Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON) has grown to inform local nonnative groups about the positive aspects of this legal action for this region. Various institutions such as the Syracuse Peace Council, SUNY–College of Environmental Science and Forestry, and Syracuse University, with the support of Chancellor Nancy Cantor, have combined forces to hold a yearlong educational series titled "Onondaga Land Rights and Our Common Future." Several other events have been planned for the near future that bring together environmental issues, global politics, social justice, and cultural identity around matters of "religion."

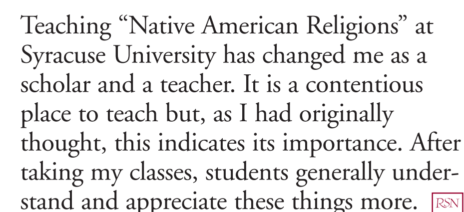
This serves as the backdrop for teaching "Native American Religions" in Central New York. Questions about the meaning of land, American cultural identity, and the contentious understanding of "religion" (which is a persistent question among all of my colleagues in religion at Syracuse University) are necessarily brought into the classroom. The first task of the class, therefore, is to problemitize the category of religion for students. Among the first things one learns is that there is no word, concept, or phenomenon internal to Native American traditions that is "religion." The Onondagas are adamant on this point. Thus, several moves have to be made to make "religion" comparable with various aspects of Native American traditions. Students have to think of "religion" in a fundamentally different way. Specifically they have to think of religion as habitation and religion as exchange. These moves bring up questions about the nature of the ways in which different people come to inhabit the land differently and how different people perform exchanges between themselves and their deities. But these are existential questions that come up when teaching Native American religions in Onondaga Nation Territory. The result is that students tend to investigate their own lives in the context of learning about others. When students who have not been exposed to Native American traditions learn about them for the first time, it can have a dramatic impact of them and how they understand their place in the world.

I bring my collaborations with the Haudenosaunee into the classroom. Living and working in Central New York makes teaching "Native American Religions" more urgent and controversial, as well as more satisfying. Reading materials are supplemented by visits to historical places and visits from the leadership of the Onondaga Nation, including Clan-mothers, Faithkeepers, and Chiefs. I also give students a number of opportunities to attend outside lectures, cultural festivals, and lacrosse games for extra credit. Often I can take a small group to visit the Onondaga Nation School. But students need to be given theoretical tools for interpreting their encounters with the Onondagas. After all, more than 500 years of intimate yet contentious interactions between indigenous and immigrant Americans has yielded little genuine intercultural sharing. Therefore the student experiences have to be guided in order that they can benefit the most from them. Students need conceptual tools in order to explore their own fascinations with respect to Native American religions. This learning takes place before, during, and after contact with the leaders of the Onondaga Nation. At least since Edward Said's work *Orientalism* decades ago, questions about how the scholar of religion can adequately describe "the other" without interrupting or destroying them are among the most pressing methodological discussions in our field. Students in my classes come to appreciate these issues firsthand. What might start as a casual interest in an exotic topic can, by the end of the semester, come to raise all kinds of vexing questions.

> *"I bring my collaborations with the Haudenosaunee into the classroom."*

The shift from an expert model of knowledge production to a collaborative model goes some way toward solving the methodological quandaries in the classroom. Rather than my asking questions about what the Onondaga believe, or what ceremonies they perform, which will always be regarded suspiciously, instead students learn to ask themselves, What are the issues of most urgent mutual concern? For one thing this requires students to develop an ability to interpret their own urgent questions — What do we want to know? — and then find answers through a collaborative process of discussion and action. No longer are the Haudenosaunee, nor the Aztec, nor the Lakota "informants." Instead, they are collaborators in generating new ways of communicating solutions to urgent issues.

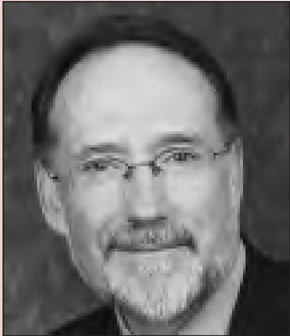
The result of teaching "Native American Religions" in Syracuse has been that I have had to develop new classes over the last ten years to cover an ever-burgeoning conceptual ground. To explore questions of religion as "habitation" and "exchange," I developed a history of American religions sequence titled "Religion and the Conquest of America" and "Religion of American Consumerism." These cover the colonial era from 1492 to the 1850s and the modern era from the late nineteenth century to the present. This sequence highlights the cultural differences between indigenous and immigrant values and asks pointed questions about the sustainability of these distinctive worldviews. To explore issues of race and ethnicity in America I have developed the class "Religious Dimensions of Whiteness." This class has been growing in popularity and attracts a wide diversity of students. Most recently I have developed the class "Religion and Sports," which is proving to be very popular. Unlike other classes of this sort, however, it is rooted in the indigenous meanings of sports in ceremonial life. The Haudenosaunee are the inventors of lacrosse, which is very popular in our area, and it is still played as a ceremonial game among the Haudenosaunee. It isn't until the class visits the lacrosse arena at the Onondaga Nation that the whole class comes together for them. In my graduate seminar "Materiality of Religion," students gain another perspective on the topic and on the history of religions, whether their primary area of interest is in postmodern theology, Buddhism, religion and popular culture, or indigenous religions.



Teaching "Native American Religions" at Syracuse University has changed me as a scholar and a teacher. It is a contentious place to teach but, as I had originally thought, this indicates its importance. After taking my classes, students generally understand and appreciate these things more.

Teaching on War

Larry Kent Graham, Iliff School of Theology



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TEACHING ABOUT WAR is inherently difficult because everyone has a history with war, and everyone has an agenda about war. When participants in "The Impact of War on the Pastoral Care of Families" confront difficult matters about the subject of war and the painful needs of those affected by war, their own histories and agendas frequently surface in compelling and unexpected ways, often occasioning interpersonal conflict among the students as well as deeper personal knowledge and soul-searching. Almost always, students discover some previously unknown and troubling dimensions of their own family's history in relation to war. In learning to provide care to those affected by war, they have to come to terms with entrenched, complicated, and sometimes offensive narrative structures of meaning used by care-seekers to cope with war's massive impact. Strong feelings of anxiety, shame, guilt, fear, anger, horror, helplessness, disbelief, shock and recovery may be elicited by confronting the realities of war. Part of my teaching strategy is to provide conceptual tools for interpreting war. I deploy a spectrum of academic, professional, and other reading, guest discussions, the construction of a family genogram and history, case consultation, and discussion. I also seek to establish a climate of care in the classroom, by which I mean listening carefully to one another and our class guests, communicating personal respect for each participant, and sharing a commitment to honest engagement of strongly held differences.

Conceptually, this course positions students on the interface between "mythic war" and "sensory war" (Hedges 2002, quoting Lawrence LeShan's *The Psychology of War*). Mythic war refers to the narrative of meanings and structures of interpretation used in public discourse, including religious teaching, to justify war and to develop codes and ethical norms by which war is promoted, endured, or opposed. Pastoral caregivers are often required to help persons affected by war to address "mythic" issues such as self-sacrifice, patriotism, the moral dimensions of violence, and the spiritual consequences of taking or losing life. Sensory war refers to the visceral responses generated by being in the direct presence of torn and destroyed human bodies and habitats, and the feeling of the suffering and despair generated by hostile acts of violence against fellow human beings. Religious leaders, and especially pastors, are often asked to be directly or indirectly present to the sensory horrors of war and to provide some form of mythic or narrative engagement of meaning in the context of immediate and ongoing loss. Since there are contending myths by which to interpret and respond to the dynamics of war, encountering sensory war can be extremely traumatic and destabilizing for students who are still developing their orienting systems and capacities for care-giving. The classroom provides a setting and context by which to confront and understand various approaches, to reach one's own conclusions, and to fashion a personal mode of care-giving in relation to war issues.

The course begins with the class reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the classic novel by Erich Maria Remarque. The 1956 novel inducts the class into a direct engagement with both the mythic and sensory dimensions of war. The myths of human grandeur and national destiny are belied by descriptions of shattered bodies and the reduction to survival instincts forced on soldiers. War severs the structure of meanings and memories that tie soldiers to their families and communities. *All Quiet on the Western Front* sets the student into a world of shattered myths, random losses, and unexpected deliverance, the gritty humanity of the soldier, and the hopeful longing for reunion with a world that can never again exist for the soldier and their loved ones.

The novel introduces the mythic and sensory structures of war at the personal, social, cultural, and familial level, yet at a distance removed from their own histories and contemporary experience, thus constructing a kind of safety net in the course. The novel provides a means to learn to listen to one another in the class context, to begin sharing one's own family history and pastoral situations, to normalize strong feelings as a part of the class discourse, and to name conflicting values and orientations to war among class members. Once students engage and discuss this book, there is no turning back; it disallows superficialities and uncovers personal and family histories and agendas, even as it provides a standpoint from which to address extremely uncomfortable realities.

In addition to reflection upon readings, the students meet guests who expand and deepen the conversation by providing their own mythic and sensory narratives of war. A graduate of the Air Force Academy and his spouse, for example, share their experiences in relation to his serving in Vietnam as a fighter pilot and the impact his service had on their marriage and family during and after the war. They share their struggles to address their growing sense of the "insanity" of the war and perceived betrayal of our country and its military by our leaders and populace. They talk about the moral silence of the chaplains during the war and their subsequent turning to antiwar activities and participation in rebuilding Vietnam.

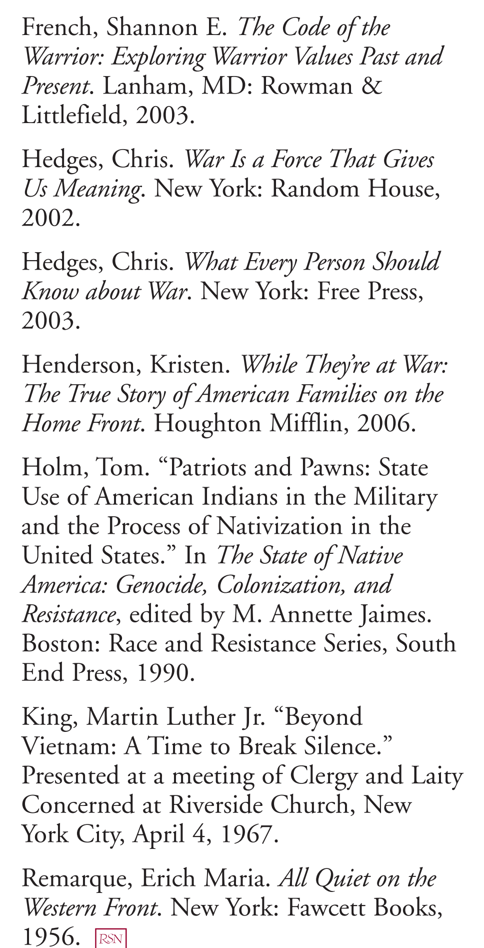
An army chaplain who served in Iraq also interacts with the class. Sometimes this conversation is difficult, especially when students hear the chaplain supporting militaristic solutions to political issues in a manner that runs counter to their own political and religious commitments. This conversation helps students wrestle with what it means to address mythic and sensory war from a professional standpoint as a military chaplain.

An African-American civil rights leader has shared the factors in his life that led him to choose to leave the army after fulfilling the terms of the draft, and subsequently become a peace activist. He stated, "I was pretty good at shooting targets. And I recognized that I enjoyed it. But I remembered the childhood teaching of my church, 'Thou shall not kill,' and I realized that the army was not teaching me to shoot because I loved shooting, but to kill people that Jesus loved." His opposition to war became active protest a few years later when he came to believe that the war in Vietnam was forcing poor people to kill poor people, and that African Americans were supposedly fighting for freedoms in Vietnam that were denied to them in the United States (King 1966). In conversations with this civil rights leader, the commitment to nonviolence and absolute pacifism clashed with theories of just war and strategic violence to protect the vulnerable and insure survival. This participant helped students address war from a larger social-justice and cultural vantage point, raising serious questions of settled norms about military heroism and patriotism as defining one's relationship to fellow human beings.

Ethnic, cultural, and historical complexity emerges through conversation with a Native-American speaker who challenges the dominant Euro-American and colonialist myths about Indian culture, especially as it relates to war. He describes precolonial Native-American views of warriors as defenders of people and land, and the limited role of killing in intertribal conflict. He also discloses the ambiguity of the United States toward Indians and war: on the one hand, Indians are regarded by the dominant culture as cruel savages, yet on the other hand, Indians have been called upon in disproportionate numbers to serve the U.S. military in this country's various wars. He describes rituals Indian communities use to restore persons to the community and to themselves after combat and how community leaders stand by Indians who chose to defend their land (not the United States government) against further outside threat through participation in military service (French 2003; Holm 1990).

This array of conversations and presentations, coupled with other reading assignments (Hedges 2002; Henderson 2006), elicit a plethora of responses. Currently, one of the students in the course has a brother-in-law in Iraq, and the readings of the course are excruciating for her. Sometimes the course has reawakened memories of past trauma, for which students have sought additional counseling. Some students become very upset that other members of the class are not more critical of war and actively opposed to it. Some students report painful conversations with family members from whom they seek information for their family history and genogram. Compounding the situation, students are barraged by a continuous stream of media portrayals of various elements of the Iraq war and they experience growing tensions between contending public myths in our country about the Iraq war and the more personal and familial narratives that support or oppose the public debate.

This class confronts necessarily painful materials. However, the difficulty can be moderated and rendered educationally productive by helping students build a climate of respect and care, by engaging rather than avoiding strong differences of values, and by exposing students to a variety of resources to empower them to engage positively with the complex interplay of mythical and sensory war in the concrete lives of real human beings.



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Teaching the Unteachable: Cassandra's Paradox

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CASSANDRA, daughter of Priam and Hecuba, was blessed with the power of prophecy. But because Cassandra refused the advances of Apollo, he cursed her that her prophecies not be believed. In *Agamemnon* her prophecies become frantic only to fade into resignation as the last hour approaches. It is from the curse that her paradox arises: on the one hand she knows the truth — she can foretell the future and she knows the evil to come and can warn about it. But the question becomes should she speak the truth if she knows it will not be believed?

The paradox lives on in the literature on genocide. Elie Wiesel's character in *Night* (1960), Moshe the Beadle, also knows the truth — in fact, he has seen and experienced it — and he returns to tell it. But like Cassandra, he is dismissed as mad, and his warnings are not heeded. The paradox faced by Cassandra and Moshe the Beadle is analogous to the paradox we face in teaching courses on genocide to undergraduates. We know the horrible subject matter and warn that it could happen here; but given the audience, we wonder what becomes of our warnings. In teaching genocide, how do we avoid the paradox of the frantic prophet?

How does one teach about an event that seems to defy both language and conventional explanations? How does one convey the horror of the event without becoming overwhelmed and numbed by it oneself? How does one deal with the inevitable tension between the need to be reasoned and analytical and the equally strong urge to be passionate and emotional and engaged? One voice says be distant and objective and quiet; the other says teach in a constant scream.

In part, genocide is hard to come to terms with because of the magnitude of the subject — the sheer numbers killed, the breadth of complicity, its pervasiveness in history. Addressed directly, genocide is overwhelming, provoking constant temptations to stop talking about it and ignore its reality, to intellectualize or abstract it from people and destroy its reality, or to despair and sink in the mire of believing genocide is all of reality.

Despite these difficulties, we decided it might be valuable to teach a course on genocide to first-year students in their first term of college. Genocide presents to us some of the deepest philosophical and religious questions we can face in the classroom. Our students ask us: In the face of so much suffering and killing, what does it mean to say one is human? They raise questions concerning God's existence and the possibility of intelligibility in the universe: If there is a Supreme Being, what kind of Supreme Being would allow such perverse evil and suffering to exist? From the point of view of secular values, they ask: Is it possible to believe any longer that history is progress?

It is one thing for students to be interested or stimulated by a topic; it is another question whether or not the material is appropriate for the students, for once immersed in the genocides of our time, the world is never the same again. The events can shatter us even as they free us from our confident and comforting illusions.

We set out with the proximate aims of trying to teach students about particular genocides in modern times, to teach them a few theoretical perspectives on why these happen and what might be done to prevent them, and to introduce students to thinking about the general problem of genocide. Our efforts were guided by a fundamental distinction between the process of learning and the process of integrating the meaning and implications of an important event into consciousness and conscience. One can learn about an event by consuming and assimilating the factual data — but though this can be an important act of witnessing in itself, it is not sufficient because such learning does not necessarily indicate understanding. Understanding and integration were our larger goals.

By integration we mean that the subject matter has been successfully absorbed by the students into their moral and intellectual world so that it somehow informs how they will now view that world. They will become sensitive to the issue of genocidal destruction and, in the best case, that sensitivity will lead to engagement, the action of resisting anything which reflects a genocidal process. From the point of view of developing an understanding of genocide, there seems to be only one good reason to force ourselves and our students to confront so much pain and suffering, and that reason is to make them and ourselves more deeply aware of and resistant to the conditions and processes that are involved in the destruction of a people.

Based on our ultimate goals we excluded a number of approaches. First we decided a presentation of events as only horror stories would not do. Such a presentation not only minimizes the significance and the importance of the event, but also erects a barrier to the students' ability to understand its implications. Contemporary studies of trauma confirm our concerns that just hearing detailed material about trauma can induce secondary traumatic stress syndrome or "vicarious trauma." Repeated exposure to traumatic stories can also lead to "empathy fatigue" or "compassion fatigue." We did not want to traumatize our own students. Moreover, in the course of 10 or 15 weeks, accumulated accounts of genocide can contribute to "burnout," a chronic condition of empathy fatigue in which constant exposure to trauma leads to less integration and engagement with the world rather than more.

Though we try not to overwhelm students, we are not always successful. A number of journal entries from students in previous classes demonstrate the level at which the material affected them. One student started to reach the threshold after just one week:

> After completing my first college paper and having the topic be on something as difficult and draining as the Holocaust I am becoming a bit apprehensive about this class. I am not sure that I will be able to handle ten weeks of depressing material. I am worried that if I continue to read literature such as *Night* over and over in this class I will not make it and will not give it my full effort, for it will not be interesting to read, it will only be upsetting to me.

We decided that one way to address the issue of numbing among students was to alternate between texts relating concrete examples of genocide, such as Eli Wiesel's *Night* (1960) or Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda* (1998), and more theoretical texts on the issue of genocide, like Herb Hirsch's *Genocide and the Politics of Memory* (1995) and Walliman and Dobkowski's *Genocide and the Modern Age* (1987). These theoretical moments of abstraction were meant to give the students a break from the gore of genocide, a framework for understanding genocide which ultimately would allow them to come back to the material less worn out.

Just as dangerous as "numbing," genocidal tales of horror are also potentially exploitative. Piling up the details of horror plays with students' emotions in a kind of manipulative fashion that can turn into a psychological or emotional exercise of power. Again, turning to the literature about trauma workers, we find that experiences of hearing about trauma create situations of negative "counter transference": in terms of a class, this means that the teacher's own psychic issues come to structure interactions in the classroom — despite the best intentions of the instructor. This problem adds to the danger of numbing students and turning them away from the material.

In addition to burnout, trauma, and manipulation, other problems surfaced. Some were expectable, such as a problem of naiveté among generally upper- and middle-class white students, or the problem of comparative suffering, in which students tried to make sense of the horror of genocide by prioritizing the genocides into a hierarchy of suffering.

Frequently there are problems with the students' ability to tolerate moral complexity and ambiguity, leading to quick moral judgments about genocide. It is as if the students are compelled to judge, simply in terms of good and bad, right and wrong, even when explicitly asked not to do so. On the other hand, the students' judgments tended not to be grounded in publicly accessible reasons, and therefore they admitted being convinced of opposite views very easily.

The problem here is that the students showed a kind of moral relativism which allowed — perhaps compelled — them to both judge and dismiss moral issues quickly, but also to admit the validity of every other claim. In either case, what the compulsion to judge cut off was the ability to explore the ways in which we, too, share culpability for genocides, even if we can immediately label them evil. To paraphrase Philip Gourevitch (1998), moral judgment about genocide is just not significant — everyone in the class already knows that genocide is wrong: what is significant is exploring how those who already know it is wrong can participate in it anyway.

It may be that the difficulties the students had with introspection and with dealing with this material are not personal, but systemic in the postmodern world. In contrast to the modern ideal of universal moral values, postmodern values may be considered more as context-related possibilities. Postmoderns, therefore, are not likely to show reactive moral responses to the threat of genocide, but to reflect on the issue in a more complex, exploratory fashion. This can be good, but it, too, can lead to begging the real questions by distancing and avoidance behavior.

To meet this challenge we had to find ways to break through what may be a fairly robust socially constructed and psychological resistance to learning about genocide in this generation of students. Our solution for this has been to provide students with conceptual maps that guide them through their thinking about genocide. For students to be able to make an event a part of their world, they need such conceptual frameworks, for as humans we only make something ours when we have some kind of symbolic framework that locates it for us, that allows us to feel the event as part of something that has a "logic" to it, no matter how perverse that logic may be. As Robert Jay Lifton (1986) has said, "The mind cannot take in or absorb those experiences that cannot be meaningfully symbolized and inwardly re-created."

Such an understanding is not easy to acquire, as we have learned repeatedly from our students. For us, right now, the framework has something to do with groping towards what we might call the dimensions of the genocidal "logic." We have chosen as our primary texts those which display this "logic," the logic of power, absolute power, dehumanization, absolute phobic dehumanization, "othering" and "absolute othering" of victims. Presented in terms of these more abstract theoretical frameworks, genocide almost seems explainable, even if we know in our hearts and souls that no explanation will ever be sufficient. In this case, theory frames Cassandra's or Moshe's frantic warnings. We may still be frantic prophets, and what we say may not really make sense, at least on an existential level, but at least we are not dismissed as mad. And the cover that theory provides allows us to hold the attention of students for at least a few moments longer.

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