
practical matters

Annotated Bibliography of Work in Ethnography and Theology

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This interactive annotated bibliography includes books and films relevant to religion and ethnography, with a particular focus on titles published and produced since 2000. Entries include suggestions about who is likely to benefit most from each title. This list is preliminary in scope and serves as an invitation to readers to contribute additional entries. *Practical Matters* staff will update the bibliography periodically. Please send suggested entries to: ethno_biblio@practicalmattersjournal.org

Books

Barrett, Ron. *Aghor Medicine: Pollution, Death and Healing in Northern India*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008.

The Aghori, an ascetic group of healers, reconfigure the ideas surrounding human mortality and disease in Indian society. Barrett illuminates the power of nondiscriminatory practices among Aghori healers, especially as it relates to curing and ritually purifying the “untouchables” in Indian society. While most books about the Aghori focus on the healing practices of the sect, this book observes the Aghor philosophy of nondiscrimination—they will heal the “untouchables” in Indian society while using “untouchable” tools that are perceived as ritual pollutants. They utilize cremation ashes, skulls, or other remains of the living in order to heal the sick and prevent illness, bridging the gap between the living and the dead and urging the patient to confront the fear of his or her own mortality. Those who are interested in Indian religion or religion and healing will gain the most from this book. Recommended for: advanced undergraduate, graduate, and professional.

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Bender, Courtney. *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Bender unearths the various ways in which “lived religion” reveals itself in the most mundane of circumstances. At God’s Love We Deliver, an organization in New York that prepares meals for those living with AIDS, the kitchen provides the scene for an ethnographic study of the religious themes in a nonreligious realm. In order to document the ways in which religion and religious practices arise in everyday lives, the author volunteered alongside those who worked in the kitchen. The book evokes questions about everyday religion as the most authentic account of faith and belief. Simple tasks such as scrubbing potatoes and slicing carrots are transformed into spiritual practice and practical religion. Documenting religious activity in a demarcated religious space elicits “expected” behaviors; yet in a setting where religious behavior is not expected, we are able to glimpse the ways in which the religious script is acted out in life. This book provides a foundation for understanding ethnography and how the most unlikely setting can provide valuable insight into human experience. Recommended for: undergraduate, graduate, and professional.

Brown, Vincent. *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.

Brown delineates the ways in which the inevitability of death shaped the everyday lives of enslaved West Africans in the Caribbean. Through what he defines as “mortuary politics,” the practices related to honoring those who have passed, including funerary rites and ancestor veneration, bring the world of the dead into the political arenas of the living. In the Caribbean, multiple cultural groups fused to create the world of the slave community. In many West African beliefs systems present in Jamaica, for example, those who no longer existed physically certainly played a large role in everyday human life. Death and the acknowledgment of the eventual demise of the human body led to complex power negotiations between European colonizers, slave-masters, and the large enslaved population in Jamaica, who retained from their African past many beliefs about navigating life and death. Scholars in Caribbean studies, (specifically, Caribbean religion), African American studies, and slave religion will find something of interest in this book. Recommended for: advanced undergraduate, graduate, and professional.

Burawoy, Michael. *The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009.

There exists a constant interchange between the ethnographer and their target populations. Typically, the researcher chooses to investigate a particular part of the human experience in a community of interest. Both parties are inevitably affected by the interplay between the researcher and the “researched,” and the extended case method aids in the development and understanding of this intimate bond. Four primary principles guide the method: the observer is an extension of the community being observed; reality is extended through time and space; social processes extend from the micro to the macro level; and, lastly, the theory of the extended case method, itself, extends

beyond the site and gives meaning to a larger social sphere. The essays in this collection reflect Burawoy's use of this methodology to explore various schools of thought in the history of ethnographic methodology, asking the researcher to be self-reflective and to recognize the extensive impact of research with a population. Recommended for: advanced graduate and experienced ethnographers. (Note: A full-length review of this title appears in Issue 3 of *Practical Matters* under "Matters Under Review.")

Csordas, Thomas J. *Body/Meaning/Healing*. New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2002.

An essential part of human existence is having a body—simply being human is an embodied experience, although the idealization about the appearance and state of the acceptable body varies by culture. What individuals do with (and to) their bodies demonstrates the values, ethics, and ideals of each culture. Healing the body, including ridding the body of illness and affliction, is a vital part of most populations—without the body one is no longer human. Csordas studies therapeutic processes, epistemologies of embodiment, and religious views of healing. In most of the chapters, he elaborates on a study he conducted in a Navajo church, exploring the existential interpretations of Native American healing in juxtaposition to Euro-American hegemony. Recommended for: advanced graduate students and professionals with a particular interest in theories of embodiment and therapeutic religious healing.

Flueckiger, Joyce Burkhalter. *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

The title of this book is an accurate descriptor of its content and demonstrates an important part of ethnographic research: the significance of the place of particular social phenomena. Amma's room, where she works as a spiritual healer in her small south Indian town, becomes its own character in this ethnography. The room is a demarcated space—the rules, the healing practices, and the beliefs that are valued in the room are not necessarily acceptable outside of the space. The rhythms and movement of the characters who enter the room for spiritual healing make it unique; each patient's narrative influences the room and what occurs in it as Amma serves the diverse group. In this space, gender (the fact that Amma is in a typically male profession) and religious background (the clients are from various faiths) are secondary to the healing practices performed. Gender and religious background become less significant as those who enter the room for healing are united in their ailments. The author highlights the concept of "vernacular Islam," or Islam that is practiced and utilized "on the ground" to deal with the circumstances of everyday life—as opposed to what occurs in designated religious settings. Recommended for: graduate students, especially those interested in the religion and health conversation.

Frederick, Marla. *Between Sundays: Black Women and Everyday Struggles of Faith*. Los Angeles CA: University of California Press, 2003.

This ethnography provides an entrée into the southern black church experience, extending far beyond the Sunday morning worship service and into everyday life. Frederick's book explores the far-reaching grasp of the pragmatic spirituality fostered in the black church, further developed and utilized in the practices associated with communal uplift and resistance to unfair social norms. Frederick describes the unequal, dichotomous world of Halifax County. In a still largely segregated area of the country like the one described in *Between Sundays*, the school systems, choice of industry, and other social inequities inspire activism as a public display of faith. The role of the church, especially in the black community, is to represent the common concerns and social condition of the members who comprise its body. In the book, faith practices reveal many aspects of the everyday lives of black churchwomen in a rural area in the South. By exploring resistance to dominant power structures, social activism, and the exploration of "religion" beyond Sunday morning worship services, Frederick creates a nuanced examination of the spiritual lives of black Christian women and the complexities within their religious worlds. Recommended for: undergraduate and graduate students.

Goldschmidt, Henry. *Race and Religion Among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006.

In an in-depth look at the divided social world of Crown Heights residents, Goldschmidt highlights the racial and religious tensions navigated by its multicultural residents. In the Brooklyn neighborhood in this ethnography, an "uneasy peace" exists, threatened by occurrences of violence and underlying issues stemming from the differences in racial and religious worldviews. Focusing on stereotypes of "Blacks" and "Jews," Goldschmidt explores the relationship between the somewhat insular Hasidic Jewish community and non-Jewish groups in the area. While many residents of New York may admit that there is unrest in Crown Heights, few studies have examined the differences that ignite the dissension in this area. Through the exploration of communities such as the Black Jews in Crown Heights, the book demonstrates how identity construction is a fluid, dynamic process, vital to community formation and co-existence. Recommended for: students interested in identity formation and methodological questions related to ethnography.

Hernandez Hiraldo, Samiri. *Black Puerto Rican Identity and Religious Experience*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2006.

The Puerto Rican town of Loiza is known for its black population and African folklore. Citizens of Loiza constantly negotiate and renegotiate their racial and religious identities, stereotypes, and power relations within the greater Puerto Rican society. Many Loizans feel as though the town is the target of negative stereotypes and receives a disproportionately small distribution of resources and tax dollars. And the role that religion plays in the comprehension of these aspects of identity is significant. By implementing an in-depth ethnographic study, Hernández Hiraldo discovers the role of the religious communities' beliefs and practices in the navigation of blackness and "Puerto Ricanness" in a society that rarely acknowledges the African influences in its popular

culture. Recommended for: undergraduate and graduate students as well as scholars working in Afro-Latino studies, Puerto Rican studies, or race studies.

McClintock Fulkerson, Mary. *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

According to McClintock Fulkerson, practical theology occurs in a contemporary situation, and in this case it is the diverse Good Samaritan United Methodist Church. The particular type of theology she suggests, grows out of a wounded state or a need that must be fulfilled in order to heal a brokenness in human existence—Good Samaritan is attempting to heal the brokenness of racism and other “-isms” that plague the church environment and larger society. Good Samaritan is a culturally mixed, post-modern environment, unique in its commitment to a purposefully constructed diversity and acceptance of all races and disabilities. At the same time, the church deals with the need to redress its own brokenness, and McClintock Fulkerson seeks to use ethnographic methods to explore the wounds inherent in this environment, of which obliviousness may play a large part. Employing a postmodern theological reading, McClintock Fulkerson examines the practices and beliefs that make Good Samaritan United Methodist Church a unique environment, focusing on the significance of place and practice in the construction of an intentionally inclusive culture that seeks to redress larger social prejudices. Recommended for: religious leaders, practical theologians, and scholars interested in congregational studies. (Note: A full-length review of this title appears in Issue 1 of *Practical Matters* under “Matters Under Review.”)

Moschella, Mary Clark. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008.

Moschella demonstrates yet another way that the field of religious studies and practical theology can gain from the ethnographer’s methodology. A core purpose of the ethnographic method is to understand and interpret a community in the words of the “people,” making it ideal for those working in and around religious communities in various capacities. The bonds between the religious practitioners and the religious leaders should be mutually reinforcing, each should learn from and teach the other in order to make the congregational experience an optimal one. Oftentimes, religious leaders impose religious views on the individuals in the pews, yet ethnographic practice guards against this unidirectionality and allows for co-authorship of experience. The book provides a clear layout of how to embark on the journey of pastoral ethnography, from how to listen to keeping a journal of one’s process—akin to the ethnographer’s fieldnotes. Recommended for: religious leaders, practical theologians, and scholars interested in congregational studies. (Note: A full-length review of this title appears in Issue 3 of *Practical Matters* under “Matters Under Review.”)

Nelson, Timothy. *Every Time I Feel the Spirit: Religious Experience and Ritual in an African American Church*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

Nelson and his wife, two white northerners, journey to the Low country in South Carolina in order to observe religious experiences in an African American church. Through interviews and careful participant observation, the sociologists discover the unique relationships between black Christians and the God they serve. The outward manifestation and expression of the Holy Spirit is a significant part of the black church experience not only in the African Methodist Episcopal church he studies, but also in the wider charismatic worship experience of African American church life. What is important for the ethnographer to realize is that practitioners must be able to describe what is important to them, rather than what is important to the researcher or what conforms to the researcher's theory. The church emphasis on its rituals and a personal, intimate relationship with God reflect a belief system interpreted and justified by the community. Recommended for: undergraduate and graduate students as well as scholars working with ethnographic methods in the field of black church studies.

Orsi, Robert A. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

To practice religion is to be engaged and intertwined in melodramas involving the supernatural world. Orsi studies relationships built by humans through communication and interaction with the Virgin Mary and the Catholic saints. There is an ever-evolving relationship with the immaterial materials, the here and the beyond, which is real and viable for the believer. He writes, "I can think of no religious world—not even Buddhism!—that does not offer practitioners opportunities to form deep ties with saints, ancestors, demons, gods, ghosts, and other special beings, in whose company humans work on the world and on themselves" (2). For him, religion is essentially "relationship," formed between the communities who practice and the supernatural forces with which they form bonds. The majority of this book is about his Catholic family and their lives in communion with the saints who direct their lives. This well-written book is not a typical ethnography, yet it offers a new perspective on the power of using ethnographic method in familiar territory, to make sense of the world immediately present. Recommended for: undergraduate and graduate students as well as religious practitioners.

Rouse, Carolyn Moxley. *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004.

Rouse seeks to understand the ways in which African American Sunni Muslim women interpret Islamic law and carve out their place in an often misunderstood and misinterpreted community. Taking into account the history of African Americans in the United States, she finds that the women adopt a particular way of understanding womanhood, femininity, and liberation, allowing them to practice their faith as both African Americans and Muslimahs. As many ethnographers do, Rouse begins her study with particular questions about a commonly misunderstood aspect of

society, investigates this phenomenon, then presents it to the wider public in order to help promote understanding. According to her, “Muslim women are enlisted along with men in the creation of an alternative social and moral space” (6). The women in Rouse’s study use narratives to interpret their own lives in ways that transcend the the negative stereotypes presented by the media and contradict publicly held ideas about the inferiority of Muslim women. This work is a great example of how to enter an often misunderstood community as an outsider and present the data that are found in a clear, concise, and respectful format. Recommended for: undergraduates, though useful also for the experienced ethnographers interested in African American religion, women’s studies in religion, or Islam in America.

Spickard, James V., Shawn J. Landres, and Meredith B. McGuire, eds. *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*. New York: New York University Press, 2002.

The editors of this book composed chapters that each deal with the process of reshaping and redefining ethnographic practices, analyzing the data, and presenting the data to an audience. No longer does the ethnographer have to be a male academic entering foreign lands in search of how the “other” lives; there are new ways to structure and conduct an ethnographic project, and certainly new ways to write about what one has discovered. The book prompts the ethnographer to instead be aware of identity, power relations, truth-making, interpretation of the “other,” and the relationship of ethnographers to those who are being “researched.” Especially in the field of religion, ethnographic methodology must be handled in a way that still acknowledges the responsibility of the researcher to protect and respect the practices of the informants. This volume provides a solid foundation for the role of ethnographic research in the field of religion, including the accountability of the scholar in the field. Recommended for: undergraduate and graduate students in introductory methods courses.

Stewart, Dianne M. *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Stewart creates a discourse of theological reflection that begins at a different point than the traditionally Christ-centered hermeneutic. This is done by delineating the African history in the Jamaican religious experience and offering a new positionality. She also recasts the framework for theological discussion. Distancing herself from the traditional theologians who have used Christianity as the denominator against which all other theologies are compared, Stewart argues for traditional African religions to be considered fields for theological discourse and discussion in their own right. Through her intense fieldwork, Stewart points to the teachings, practices, and beliefs systems in the African derived religions in Jamaica as groundwork for an ingenious spin on womanist liberation theology. Recommended for: graduate students and researchers interested in Caribbean studies, womanist theology, or constructive theology.

Swinton, John and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM Press, 2006.

Written for those who are unfamiliar with the field of social science and its implications for the study of religion and theology, this book provides an elementary layout of the processes of conducting qualitative research. The authors attempt to show that the fields of social science and theology are not as incongruent as one who has little knowledge about either field might expect. Perhaps most useful for an undergraduate class that is just beginning its journey into the world of ethnographic method and qualitative research, the reader is introduced, step-by-step, to the ways in which practical theology and qualitative research may overlap. The authors explain how qualitative methodological procedures such as ethnography, interviews, and participant observation can be useful tools for collecting data about the practices of religious communities. . Recommended for: introductory courses for graduate students in the social sciences and practical theology. (Note: A full-length review of this title appears in Issue 1 of *Practical Matters* under “Matters Under Review.”)

Films

Devil's Playground. DVD. Directed by Lucy Walker. New York: Wellspring / Stick Figure Productions, 2002.

Many Americans view the Amish as a mysterious group of people riding in horse-drawn buggies, and plain clothes living alongside the “English” world yet remaining separate from it. The Amish way of life is secluded, and close communal bonds are formed among the practitioners of the faith. Family, modesty, and faith in God are heralded as the most important parts of life—the Amish community is set apart from the world, lives simply, and works hard. At age 16, however, each child is encouraged to seek other experiences outside of the Amish world and enjoy the “English” lifestyle (the Devil’s playground). This period is called the *Rumspringa*, and lasts until each young person is ready to make an informed decision about joining the church and committing oneself fully to the community.

From Babylonia to Beverly Hills: The Exodus of Iran's Jews. Videocassette. Directed by Tanaz Eshaghian. Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 2003.

The onset of Iran’s Islamic regime in the late seventies brought with it fears of religious persecution for non-Muslim citizens, among them, Jewish Persians, who fled the country in record numbers to begin a new life in America. In America, they believed they would be able to practice their religion freely, without trepidation.. In Beverly Hills, a growing population of Persian immigrants finds a home in a new land much unlike their homeland. This film recounts the stories of those who made the transition to the California town and the close-knit community they built while pursuing their dream of religious freedom in Los Angeles. The film documents the struggle among youth and adults to maintain Persian culture while adjusting to American life remains.

Ground Zero Spirituality at St. Paul's Chapel. Videocassette. Produced by Paul Brubaker. New York: Trinity Television and New Media, 2002.

The horrifying events that occurred on September 11, 2001 will long be burned in the memories of millions of Americans. Neither New York, nor Ground Zero, will ever be the same. Witnesses recount the stories of the day. Buildings for several block surrounding the World Trade center were crumbled into dust. The church that sat a block away, however, St. Paul's Chapel, miraculously had very little damage. Built in 1766 and protected by giant sycamore trees, the oldest church in Manhattan provided a haven for public service workers who helped to clean up the disaster. Volunteers used the church as a prayer center, resting spot, food service center, and health-care clinic. The open door policy of St. Paul's Chapel is a model for the Church—demonstrating the Church's remarkable potential for creating bonds among a diverse group of people, regardless of their personal histories.

Nuestra Comunidad: Latinos in North Carolina. Videocassette. Directed by Joanne Hershfield and Penny Simpson. North Carolina: New South Productions, 2001.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Latino population in the United States rose significantly. According to the film, the population increased over 400% between 1990 and 2000. The rise of Mexican, Salvadorian and Honduran populations in the southeastern United States provoked mixed reactions among southerners, from acceptance to outright racism. Mostly from impoverished and uneducated backgrounds, the still growing Latino population predominately occupies factory and farm jobs in North Carolina. Contrary to popular belief, the population has had a significant, positive impact on the economy in the region, and a Latino immigrant presence continues to offer cultural diversity. The documentary profiles various immigrants and their stories of acclimation to American life, highlighting how family and community life as well as cultural bonds have helped with the transition.

This Far By Faith: African American Spiritual Journeys. DVD. Produced by Blackside, Inc. & The Faith Project, Inc., in association with the Independent Television Service. Boston: WGBH/PBS, 2003.

This documentary recounts the extraordinary faith of African descendants in the United States and the undeniable relationship to the divine that has uplifted the hearts and souls of an oppressed people for centuries. In immense numbers, enslaved Africans adopted and then amalgamated the religion of their white oppressors, fashioning a religious experience that fit their needs and offered refuge from the harsh conditions of slavery. For many African Americans, diverse religious traditions have been the sources for a faith in a God who provides the strength and endurance for unimaginable treatment throughout history. Scholars of African American religion discuss the power faith in a higher power has when an entire race must confront the multiple manifestations of racism and prejudice in different eras, from slavery and segregation to the Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements.

An annotated bibliography provides a brief account of the available research on a given topic. It is a list of research sources that includes concise descriptions and evaluations of each source. The annotation usually contains a brief summary of content and a short analysis or evaluation. Purpose of an annotated bibliography. When set as an assignment, an annotated bibliography allows you to get acquainted with the material available on a particular topic. Depending on your specific assignment, an annotated bibliography might include background materials and references to previous work by the same author usually are not included. As you are addressing one text at a time, there is no need to cross reference or use in-text citations to support your annotation.