

RELIGION, POST-RELIGIONISM, AND RELIGIONING:
RELIGIOUS STUDIES
AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL DEBATES¹

MALORY NYE

The interaction between the contemporary study of religion and contemporary cultural debates has tended to be marked by indifference, and there have been relatively few attempts to engage with the discourses of postmodern theory. In this paper I examine some of the ways in which recent anthropologists have sought to question some of their basic disciplinary assumptions with regard to the 'culture concept', particularly by putting forward strategies of 'writing against culture' or by writing culture in more dynamic terms (as cultural or culturing). This insight, which is relevant in itself to the contemporary study of religion, can be extended to a re-evaluation of the 'religion' concept, which I suggest could be reconstructed in terms of practice theory as religious practice or religioning. In conclusion I argue that to maintain its relevance within the broad field of contemporary humanities scholarship, the discipline of religious studies needs to align itself more clearly (theoretically and methodologically) with the dynamic interface between the approaches of cultural anthropology, cultural theory, and other 'postmodern' theoretical discourses.

1. *A view from/of anthropology*

For some people working within the discipline of religious studies it may come as a surprise to reflect on the considerable crises and 'culture wars' that are raging through many areas of humanities scholarship. Sometimes it appears that religious studies has become an academic backwater, whose main protagonists are happy to ig-

¹ Versions of the argument in this paper have been presented in various contexts, including the British Association for the Study of Religion annual conference in Stirling, the Department of Religious Studies, University of Lancaster, and the Beckett Institute, Oxford University. I would like to thank the following for useful comments and suggestions on the ideas which I am presenting: Steve Sutcliffe, Simon Coleman, Mary Keller, Nicole Bourque, Corinne Dempsey, Robert Segal, Kim Knott, Ian Reader, Dominic Corrywright, Russell McCutcheon, Ann Grodzins Gold, Cat McEarchern, Aislinn Jones, Judith Macpherson, and Kerry Huntly.

nore and avoid the conceptual chaos which is raging around them.² Despite being a group of scholars who pride themselves on their multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity, the direction of religious studies as a discipline seems to have been left relatively unaffected so far by the development of postmodernism and critical theory (not to mention a host of other late twentieth-century conceptual developments).

As a social anthropologist I find myself somewhat bemused and confused by the resolute determination of the discipline of religious studies to avoid some pretty fundamental developments. As an undergraduate student in London in the mid 1980s, I was in one of the first classes to find Lévi-Straussian structuralism irrelevant and nonsensical. The elaborate ethnographic frameworks of binary oppositions that had so excited a previous generation of students and produced such turgid (and abstract) ethnographic accounts seemed to pass most of my class by, and to this day I can see that to be an anthropologist of religion (or indeed a religion scholar) it is possible to take-or-leave Claude Lévi-Strauss and his grand semiology. (In this sense, if not in any other way, I could claim—along with other anthropologists of my generation—the identity of a ‘post-structuralist’.) However, developments in anthropology, and indeed other disciplines, from the mid 1980s onwards will not, I argue, be so easy to ignore.

The first major shake-up of anthropology in this era came with the publication of James Clifford and George Marcus’s collection of papers called *Writing Culture* (1986). Although not received with overwhelming enthusiasm by all anthropologists (see, for example, Mascia-Lees et al. 1989), the volume raised a number of extremely significant questions about the processes of ethnographic representation. In particular it brought to the fore the perspective that ethnography is more than simply done ‘in the field’, it is equally created through the literate strategies of anthropological authors. The classic ethnographic writings of the ‘sacred cows’ of anthropology (particularly Bronislaw Malinowski and Edward Evans-Pritchard) were deconstructed to demonstrate some of the politics (as well as poetics) of the circumstances under which they were written. I think it is no

² For example, Ernest Gellner’s reactionary book *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion* (Gellner 1992) is commonly used as the definitive guide to postmodern thinking on the role of religion in contemporary culture.

understatement to say that following the widespread dissemination of this book, the task of anthropological writing could never be the same again. Returning from 'the field' to one's desk and 'writing up' research involves more than simply blending description with theory; the very act of writing a particular type of text is a discursive strategy which constructs through representation the 'reality' that the text takes as its object.

The debates about *Writing Culture* have not stood still over the past ten or so years (see Spencer 1989; James and Hockey 1998; Moore 1994), and I would guess that anthropologists are still as unsure at the end of the decade about what they could or should do with the processes of writing cultures/ethnographies as they were at the beginning. On top of these questions have been added a number of other fundamentals about the processes of being and doing anthropology, such as the role of culture within anthropological discourses (Abu-Lughod 1991; Keesing 1994), the intense relationships of power and personality between anthropologists, their informants (now a difficult term), and their colleagues (Okely 1996; Said 1989), and also the boundedness of the places where they do their fieldwork (Appardurai 1986; Gupta and Ferguson 1982; Clifford 1997). All this has become bound up with the fundamental question of what anthropologists think they are doing, and the political relations between western academia and diverse cultural and political groups ('the rest') which were framed for the formative years of the discipline under the structures of colonialism (Asad 1973). Whatever may now be the practices of anthropologists, contemporary proponents of the discipline cannot ignore its colonial roots and its postcolonial inheritance.

2. *Crisis? What crisis?*

When considering these debates, I find it remarkable that there have been few echoes of this within the discourses of religious studies. Is the writing of religion any different from the writing of culture (McCarthy Brown [1991] gives some interesting pointers in this respect), and what are the relations of power between the discourses that religion scholars produce and the manifestations and people they are seeking to analyze? On a wider level, the emerging disciplines of cultural studies, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism are generating wave after wave of questions about academic as well as cultural (and religious) practice which have only occasionally

(and very recently) begun to spill over into the pages of leading religion journals.³ When one looks at religious studies, the question that I find needs to be asked is, "Where is 'post-religionism'?"

On some occasions it appears to me that the disciplines of religious studies and anthropology have been diverging rather than converging in recent years. Scholars of religion have been prepared to take on board some of the innovations in theory and methodology that were on offer from previous generations of anthropologists at the beginning of the 1990s, particularly Clifford Geertz's (1973) hermeneutic/symbolic analysis, along with Victor Turner's and Mary Douglas's symbolic functionalism. Fieldwork as one of many methodologies is now a serious research path for the would-be scholar, although the place and politics of the research is usually left distinctly hidden in the texts that are produced. This arrival of anthropology—and, to a much greater extent, of sociology—has produced a change from the formative phenomenological model of religious studies that was associated with Ninian Smart and the University of Lancaster in the 1970s. The development of a 'new Lancaster' model, associated with writers such as Richard Roberts and Paul Heelas, means that we can perhaps talk of a religious studies which is now post-phenomenological, or post-Smartian (see, for example, Heelas 1998). But there remains a strong resistance to exploring the theoretical and methodological critiques of postmodern theory within the broader discipline.

Where there has been any serious engagement between postmodern theory and the study of religion it has often been Christian theologians at the vanguard, delighting in the textual emphases of the deconstructionism of Derrida and Lacan. One of the first things that I learnt when I started teaching within a department of religious studies (and indeed one of the first things I and others teach new and prospective students) is that the study of religion is different from theology. The establishment of the discipline—certainly within European contexts, and still to a large extent in North America—has been fought with Christian theology as the significant other: the maxim is that the study of religion is not the same as the doing of theology. With this in mind, the development of postmodern (particularly post-structuralist) discourses within certain branches of theology in Europe

³ See, for example, Chidester (1996, 1998), Fitzgerald (1995, 1997, 1999), Geertz (1994), Strenski (1998), and Taylor (1998).

and North America will most likely lead to a further bifurcation of religious studies and the wider developments within anthropology and cultural studies. More generally, my impression is that scholars of religion have been so taken up with perpetuating and maintaining a discipline of religious studies for themselves *vis-à-vis* theology and theologians⁴ that they have failed to notice that the wider vista outside these narrow confines has been rapidly changing. If other disciplines are any indication of possible future developments, it appears that the theoretical edge of religious studies is likely either to significantly stagnate over the next decade, or otherwise to become engulfed by a considerable shake-up and 'postmodern crisis'.

3. *Rethinking culture*

To take one example of my contention with the current practice of religious studies, I intend to explore in this paper certain conceptualizations of what is generally perceived as being the subject matter of the discipline, that is 'religion'. This term is still widely (universally) used in the discipline, even though there is almost equivalent recognition that it is inadequate (W. C. Smith 1978). 'We know' that the concept of religion is a trope, or a typology, that it is untranslatable into many of the languages that religion scholars work in, and that it bears little relation to any 'emic' discourses. This notwithstanding, there remains a considerable taken-for-grantedness about it, since it seems to work well enough (most of the time) and there does not seem to be enough at stake to question use of the word or to find an alternative conceptualization. As I will discuss later, as long ago as 1983 the anthropologist Talal Asad wrote an extensive critique of the

⁴ The majority of religious studies departments in Britain operate within the context of units which contain (and often are dominated by) Christian theologians. There are exceptions to this, for example, at Lancaster, Bath, SOAS, and my own department in Stirling. However, it is still remarkable to note that Stirling is the *only* place where religious studies is taught in Scotland as an autonomous subject from theology (divinity). At a wider political level, the panel for assessment for the government-led Research Assessment Exercise in Britain condenses religious studies and theology as a distinct discipline (with religious studies being a sub-area alongside Christian theology and biblical Studies). The evaluations that this panel makes of individuals' and departments' research value have very significant effects on funding levels and appointments. It is worth noting that there have been very few attempts to argue that religious studies departments should be assessed by panels other than theology.

conceptualization of the term 'religion', which was published in *Man* —the leading journal of British social anthropology.⁵ It seems that the politics of perpetuating religious studies as a discipline has taken priority over any sustained attempt to examine the political strategies that underline the construction of religion as an object.

Before I pursue this deconstruction of religion, however, I wish to examine some anthropological discourses to review how a similar, indeed related, concept has been thoroughly debated and problematized in recent years. That is the term 'culture', which has (certainly as far as North American anthropology is concerned) been as foundational a concept in anthropology as religion has been in religious studies. I pursue this strategy not only because of the interesting and helpful developments that have been made to rethink culture, but also because the conceptualization of religion as culture (in some form or other) is a strong element of contemporary religious studies particularly through the incorporation of the theoretical work of Clifford Geertz (particularly Geertz 1973a).⁶

If there is a 'traditional' (or pre-postmodern) understanding of culture in anthropology, then it lies somewhere between Edward. B. Tylor and Clifford Geertz. For Tylor, "Culture or Civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [*sic*] as a member of society" (1871: 1). With a little more sophistication, and many more years of direct ethnographic experience to his credit, Clifford Geertz was able to assert, nearly a century later, that for him "man [*sic*] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun", and that

⁵ I must note here that it took until 1995 for the publishers of *Man* to finally agree that the title was anachronistic and that it should be changed (to the, much less snappy, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*). However, if the leading lights of anthropological discourses appear slow to respond to issues of gender inclusivity in language there are some within religious studies who are positively procrustean. In the summer of 1999 the religious-studies-uk mailbase (email) discussion list saw a series of flame postings from senior academics when a (female) member of the list questioned a previous posting that had described religion as "an important part of *man's* experience". Although a substantial number of contributors rejected such a position, a significant minority assertively argued that the term 'man' *should be* understood inclusively.

⁶ Culture is also becoming a debated term within religious studies through another route, that is through the tentative engagements with cultural studies where the 'culture concept' is being put hard to work. I will be coming back to some of these issues later in the paper.

culture is those webs (1973b: 5). Elsewhere, in his classic “Religion as a Cultural System” article, he draws this out further to suggest that culture

denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men [*sic*] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life. (1973a: 89)

For many anthropologists (and indeed many scholars of religion) this is what culture ‘is’: what the study of culture should be looking for, and at, is a thing which is manifest in people and is transmitted from generation to generation, from context to context.⁷

Against this approach, the critical re-evaluation of the culture concept has largely been a product of the debates emerging out of the ‘writing culture’ school. Thus James Clifford wrote in his introduction to that volume that, “Cultures are not scientific ‘objects’ (assuming such things exist, even in natural sciences). Culture, and views of ‘it’, are produced historically, and are actively contested.... If ‘culture’ is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitively interpreted” (1986: 18-19). The proposition that the ‘cultures’ of ethnographic writing are discursive rather than encapsulated essences provides a radical perspective which could very easily slip into the relativist position that there are no cultures, merely textual (and other discursive versions) of what is thought to be culture. For many anthropologists this strong critique is a justifiable one. There is certainly a great deal of mileage to be extracted from the argument that ‘other cultures’ are produced through textual strategies of representation, and that these are largely derived from the hegemonic western positions that Edward Said labeled as Orientalism (1978). Whether or not this dissolves anthropology or opens up new and exciting prospects is still being strongly contested, but anthropologists are keenly aware of the fact that differences between people are important—and it can be

⁷ The concept of culture is nuanced in ways other than this, particularly as a means of describing “the sum total of superior, morally and spiritually edifying human accomplishments” (Masuzawa 1998: 71). For a careful and sophisticated discussion of the complex interplay between these two different ideas of culture, Masuzawa’s article is a very useful introduction. See also Lincoln (2000). For an argument against anthropological (and anthropology-derived) appropriations of the concept of culture, see McCauley and Lawson (1996).

useful to talk of some of these differences as *cultural* differences. The question left unanswered, however, is “How does one talk of such differences?”, or “What makes the difference, in the first place?”

Taking as her starting point the exclusion of feminists and ‘halfies’⁸ in the discourses of writing culture, Lila Abu-Lughod wrote that the term culture “operates in anthropological discourse to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy” (1991: 137-38). Thus, talking of cultures and cultural differences sets up a self and an other which is difficult to transgress. For feminist or halfie anthropologists such transgression therefore goes against the grain of anthropology: an anthropological dilemma arises when the self the feminists or halfies assume themselves to be seems to be situated somewhere between the cultures of the self and other. “Standing on shifting ground makes it clear that every view is a view from somewhere and every act of speaking a speaking from somewhere” (141). However, the talk of cultures and cultural differences leaves no space for such a positionality. Thus, “if ‘culture’, shadowed by coherence, timelessness, and discreteness, is the prime anthropological tool for making ‘other’, and difference ... tends to be a relationship of power, then perhaps anthropologists should consider strategies for *writing against culture*” (147; emphasis added).

The strategies she proposes are diverse and exciting, suggesting that the processes of writing ethnography should focus on discourses and practices, in tracing of global and historical connections, and the uncovering of particularities. The intention is to write about those aspects of the practice of life as observed (with the contradictions and politics that this involves), rather than attempting to provide more abstract frameworks. In doing so Abu-Lughod argues that the writing should work against the over-determinations of a generalizing culture concept and provide a more reflective means of representing the contexts in which anthropologists work.

A rather different (and perhaps more traditional) approach is put forward by Roger Keesing (1994), who in a provocative article tries to rescue back for anthropology the distinctive edge that the ‘culture concept’ used to have. In particular he looks towards the use by other

⁸ Abu-Lughod defines ‘halfies’ as “people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage” (1991: 137), and as such is a personal descriptor which overlaps to a considerable degree with the more widely used concept of ‘hybridity’.

scholars—particularly in cultural studies—of the term culture, but very often with a quite different approach. He asks if there is any point of connection between these two quite different conceptualizations of culture—in cultural anthropology and cultural studies—and to what degree are there any continuities (and differences) between them? Writing in the early 1990s, it was clear that there had been considerable resistance by anthropologists to the critiques offered from cultural studies and postmodern perspectives, and though he wished to distance himself from some of the arguments, Keesing felt there should be some rapprochement. In his attempt to rejuvenate anthropology's discourses on culture, he points to the fundamental problem that anthropologists find it all too easy to talk of culture in a taken-for-granted way, assuming that cultures are like 'coral reefs' with a "cumulated accretion of minute deposits, essentially unknowable, and irrelevant to the shapes they form" (Keesing 1994: 301).

Thus anthropologists continue to talk "as if 'a culture' was an agent that could do things; or as if 'a culture' was a collectivity of people" (302). Although anthropologists know that this is a misleading way to talk, "we don't really mean that 'Balinese culture' does or believes anything, or that it lives on the island of Bali (it is all a kind of 'shorthand'); but I fear that our common ways of talk channel our thought in these directions" (302). Elaborating on this, Keesing argues that the essentialism of such a discourse reflects "vested disciplinary interests in characterizing exotic otherness" (303). Hence the experience for many (western) anthropologists is to travel to remote communities (such as in New Guinea or the Amazon region) looking for such a 'culture', only to find the people there "listening to transistor radios or watching videos..., going to church and attending schools instead of conducting rituals in men's houses" (303). Instead of asking questions and deriving theories from this actual experience, the ethnographic product is based on a belief "that their essential culturalness lives on despite the outward changes in their lives" (303).

What Keesing is arguing, therefore, is that—against Geertz—it is misleading to think of the 'webs of significance' that are called culture as *something* that is dumped on people by their society, and that exists in a concrete form like a coral reef. What is called culture—through intellectual and discursive laziness, mainly because it is very hard to think of an alternative way of describing 'it'—is instead a location which is largely constructed by a person's situation in particular so-

cial-structural circumstances (according to class, gender, age, ethnicity, and other factors). But a person's performance of culture—how they do or live such a placement—also comes out of the dynamics of diverse structural influences.

In putting forward this argument, Keesing presents an understanding of culture which assumes that the term is meant as an adjective rather than a noun, that it is less useful to talk of *culture* than of *cultural* manifestation, cultural values, cultural discourses and particularities, and so on (309). His approach, therefore, suggests a change of terminology but also an attempt to salvage a foundational term rather than to effect the writing against it that Abu-Lughod suggests. Similarly, Arjun Appadurai suggests a shift from culture to cultural which, he argues, “moves into a realm of differences, contrasts and comparisons ... which builds on the context-sensitive, contrast-centered heart of Saussurean linguistics” (1996a: 12). However, this shift from noun to adjective may not go far enough, as Michael Lambek proposes:

Perhaps one way to avoid the negative repercussions of analytic elegance is to change our conceptual apparatus from nouns to verbs.... It is to resurrect Leslie White's (1949) memorable dictum that 'culture is culturing'. When culture is reconstructed as verb rather than noun, it is no longer discrete or stable and hence cannot be 'captured'. (1995: 275)

Thus, to talk of culturing reflects a notion of culture as fluid, which goes beyond the static, bounded units of traditional anthropology, and instead recognizes the negotiated, performed, and contested elements of doing culture. Culture as a verb rather than a noun suggests that culture is not something that does, but is instead done—culture is practiced, or more accurately, one can only understand cultural forms when they are manifest in practices. The key point is that culture cannot be observed or analyzed, but is instead known through manifestation, through being embodied in persons, in actions, in discourses, and in particular contexts.

The fluidity and activity of such a concept of culture (or culturing) is expressed quite clearly in James Clifford's (1997) conceptualization of 'traveling cultures', through which he seeks to question the assumption that cultures are fixed with relation to places (see also Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Appadurai 1986, 1996b). A deeply held perspective in anthropology works on the assumption that culture and place are inseparable: to study culture in New Guinea the re-

searcher goes to New Guinea and sets up her/his tent in a New Guinea village. Being in the place and living with the people gives access to the culture of those people. Such a perspective is, of course, very much derived from the essentializing primitivism of early anthropology, deriving from the founding fathers of Boas and Malinowski. But it is not altogether removed from dominant discourses of religious studies—to ‘understand’ Hinduism (or so I have been told) the researcher really needs to know India; likewise Islam is best understood by reference to its roots in the Middle East.

Within this model, Clifford argues, there is no room for travel, for the unremarked elements of flux and spatial dislocation involved in the academic processes of generating accounts of such culture. How does the anthropologist get to the village, what other travelers (native and non-native) are implicated in the arrival, how is the exit of the anthropologist managed? Alongside this, the people he or she is studying may also be travelers—not everybody stays still. In western countries it is taken for granted that people move about, that temporary and permanent dislocation is a very strong element of western life. But such experiences of travel and dislocation can be equally prolific in even the most ‘traditional’ of ‘village communities’, whether for reasons of labor migration (seasonal or lifelong), education, trade, pilgrimage, social networking, or curiosity. Just because an anthropologist sets up camp to stay in a village it does not mean her/his subjects of research will remain still. To illustrate this point, Clifford uses as an extreme example the Moe family, a group of traditional Hawaiian musicians who had spent fifty-six years traveling, on the road, performing their ‘authentic’ forms of Hawaiian musical culture to international audiences, almost never going back to Hawaii (1997: 25). These cultural practices are deemed authentic and traditional, yet they have taken place not in the locality where they are rooted, but *en route* in hotel rooms and public theaters.

This example is obviously an extreme case to make a point, but the prominence of diasporic cultural manifestations exemplifies such traveling cultures equally clearly. It is almost impossible to identify the locational roots of contemporary British South Asian religious and cultural practices—which derive of course from various parts of India and Pakistan, but are also shaped by East African influences, inter-regional experiences within Indian diasporas, as well as various particularities and fluidities of migration to western (and non-western) countries. Thus, to understand various manifestations of Hindu

religiosity and cultural practice in Britain is not merely a matter of looking to see connections and dislocations between parts of Gujarat and Punjab (in India) and the people who have settled in Britain. The processes of travel, dislocation, and relocation that are ongoing (and do not end on the day after migration) are part of the practices of culture. The cultural identities and performances that are labeled as 'Hindu culture' or 'Muslim culture' in Britain are performed out of the experiences of the particular, generating unique but authentic reinterpretations of such cultures in new contexts. Thus to talk of 'cultural baggage' is not to refer to a pre-existent and fixed package that can be made up post-migration from kit-form like an IKEA bookcase; instead, it implies the fluidity of a suitcase of performative strategies that can be taken out, worn, and reshaped to fit into the lived experiences that emerge from the processes of travel (and settlement). In this respect, the culture to be identified is not the clothes within the suitcase, but the practices and discourses through which those 'clothes' are worn, performed, and contextualized. The academic stress therefore shifts from looking at the reinterpretation of the culture of the cultural baggage, to the culturing (and reculturing) of the performances out of the baggage.

It is, of course, an important point to make that these are academic reflections on critical analyses of cultural practice. From a 'native point of view' the discourses may well be working on a different level; there may well be talk of 'our culture' and 'their culture', that 'we' (as a culture and a community) have a particular way of doing things that needs to be preserved (and essentialized). Gerd Baumann describes this as the difference between *demotic* and *dominant* discourses on culture: "the dominant discourse views 'culture' as the reified possession of 'ethnic' groups or 'communities'", whilst "the demotic discourse questions and dissolves this equation between 'culture', ethnos, and 'community'" (1997: 209). Scholars can be implicated in helping to produce such reified dominant discourses of cultural purity at local levels (for example through the production and perpetuation of the concept of Hindu cultural and religious unity), but they can be equally guilty of berating their subjects for failing to see that their 'cultures' are imagined, reinvented, and reconstructed. Baumann suggests that both perspectives can be too extreme, that critical scholarship should recognize the operation of both demotic and dominant discourses at the level of practice. That is, very often the practice of culture involves a 'dual discursive competency'. The

experience of culture is very often a juxtaposition of people reifying their 'culture' whilst simultaneously being "aware of remaking, reshaping, and reforming" it (214). The art of the scholarly observer of such processes operates at the various levels of discursive and political practice, and indeed one of the challenges to such an observer is to remain aware of how s/he—as a scholar and as a participant—is also implicated in these processes.

4. *Deconstructions of religion*

Having mapped out some fundamental reconceptualizations within anthropology over the question of culture, it also needs to be stated plainly that these perspectives have profound implications on the ways in which scholars of religion should be thinking about their material. The principle that particular religious manifestations are related to particular cultures is paradigmatic within the contemporary discipline. But the full implications of what a deconstruction of the 'culture concept' would mean to the particularities of religious studies have yet to be explored. Nor has there been much in the way of sustained engagement with a crucial article by Talal Asad—now more than fifteen years since it was published—which can be read on one level as a refutation of Geertz's approach, and on a different (but related level) as a Foucauldian undermining of the purposes of studying religion.

In a paper that was first published under the title of "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion" in 1983 (and was subsequently republished in a collection of his papers in 1993) Talal Asad uses as his starting point an extended review and critique of Clifford Geertz's highly influential paper "Religion as Cultural System" (1973a). Initially, Asad presented his argument as an "exploration and not refutation" (1983: 237)⁹ of Geertz's definition of religion,¹⁰ although the

⁹ On republishing the essay in 1993 in a collection of his work, Asad modified this to describe his own essay as a "not primarily critical review of Geertz's ideas on religion—if this had been my aim I would have addressed myself to the entire corpus of his writings on religion in Indonesia and Morocco" (1993: 29). In the ten years between the initial and subsequent publications, Asad had obviously moved away from feeling such necessity to show deference to the school of anthropology which Geertz represented.

¹⁰ Geertz's well-known definition of religion is that "a religion" is a "system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and

end-product is a substantial problematization of Geertz's analysis. Asad's concern is to locate Geertz's definition (and the many other such universalizing definitions of religion) within a Foucauldian political history of knowledge. What Asad is primarily trying to show is the genealogy of how Geertz came to feel it was reasonable to think of religion in the way he did, as a system of symbols, etc. That is, Asad provides an exploration of how academic discourses on religion are related to the social contexts in which they are embedded.

In particular Asad questions the social and political forces that have structured the ways of thinking of anthropologists and other writers on religious theory. This leads him to conclude that "there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not only because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes" (1993: 29).

The connection between religious theory and practice is fundamentally a matter of intervention—of constructing religion in the world (not in the mind) through definitional discourses, interpreting true meanings, excluding some utterances and practices and including others. Hence my repeated question: *how does theoretical discourse actually define religion?* (44, emphasis added)

Thus, Asad argues against western academic assumptions that religion is 'out there' to be studied, and that indeed it is necessary to recognize that these assumptions are themselves part of a discourse which has its uses primarily for academics to define the subjects of their studies.¹¹ "The anthropological student of *particular* religions should therefore begin from this point, in a sense unpacking the comprehensive concept which he or she translates as 'religion' into heterogeneous elements according to its historical character" (54, emphasis in original).

There has, of course, been almost endless debate within the study of religion (across the many branches that make up the discipline) of what the term 'religion' is intended to refer to, of how it should (or

motivations in men [*sic*] by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic" (1973a: 90).

¹¹ I think it is worth comparing this position with Jonathan Z. Smith's classic quote that: "Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his [*sic*] imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy" (1982: xi).

should not) be defined and understood (e.g., Clarke and Byrne 1993; Pals 1996), and indeed Geertz's own contribution to this debate (1973a) has been extremely significant. What Asad is arguing, however, is something different: that is, the academic is not a neutral part of these processes of definition, and the discourses that are used by academics (in the study of religion, or any other discipline) emerge out of a particular political situation. Thus the strategy of talking of religion (like culture) sets up, and is determined by, certain sets of power relations—and is very often a means by which a group or location is defined as other.

This approach is made explicit by David Scott, writing about how certain religious manifestations in Sri Lanka came to be labeled as 'demonic' in academic discourses (following from Christian missionaries centuries before).

Part of the problem to be sketched and investigated therefore has precisely to do with the instability of what gets identified and counted by authorized knowledges as 'religion': how, by whom, and under what conditions of power. The point is that the determining conditions of what gets categorised as 'religion' are historically and culturally variable, a fact that anthropologists too often ignore in their attempts to identify universal effects and essential processes. (1992: 333)

Rather than taking religion (or religions) as a given, this approach assumes that the term creates a discursive field into which predominantly western scholars place difference. This religion is seen as somehow in opposition to scientific, commonsensical, or practical knowledge,¹² and although particular 'religions' may engage with such forms of rationality 'they' will still be considered by definition as irrational (or having 'their own' form of rationality).

I find there are remarkable parallels to be drawn here with Abu-Lughod's comments about the practice of research on the culture concept within such a framework by "feminists and halfies" (1991). In particular, the fact that the concept of engagement and positionality in the study of religion has remained an unresolved problem (what has come to be known as the insider/outsider debate; see McCutcheon 1999). That is, such a construction of difference—through the fixity of the 'religious' subject / 'non-religious' scholar—leaves no space between the two positions, and in effect produces a

¹² For elaborations of this idea see Geertz (1973b: 111-112, 119-122) and Leach (1969: 93, 107-108).

hierarchical relationship in which the scholar is empowered through his or her ability to define what particular types of knowledge are valid. At its most extreme this discourse produces 'explanations' or 'reductions' of religion, with the scholar in a position to give a judgement on what the 'religion' is 'really about'. The other extreme is seen most clearly in a piece of research in which the researcher 'goes [or is already] native', and so is challenged to show a critical detachment from her/his religious assumptions. Such an option is where Abu-Lughod locates halfie research, for example a Muslim studying within an Islamic context, or indeed a Christian studying within a Christian context.¹³

When conducting fieldwork in rural France, the anthropologist Jeanne Favret-Saada came to the conclusion that whilst there she needed to adopt a particular strategy towards the discourses on witchcraft which she found so prolific: "to understand the meaning of this discourse [the 'gift' of unwitching, 'seeing everything'] there is no other solution but to practice it oneself, to become one's own informant" (1980: 22). Likewise, Karen McCarthy Brown found that she was happy to allow a considerable breaking down of the distinction between herself (as white female academic) and New York Haitian Vodou practitioners, clients, and the healing/spiritual methods they used. However, in her case she found it necessary to place herself as separate from what she experienced:

One of the major risks involved losing the important distinction between Vodou interacting with the life of a Haitian and Vodou interacting with my own very different blend of experience, memory, dream, and fantasy. My experiences with Vodou both are and are not like those of Haitians. (1991: 11)

When writing up these experiences she recognized that the stories she told "have authority only in the territory between cultures" (11), and to get into this space she had to "open up her life" in ways which seemed to take her some distance from the expectations of normative ethnography. Although she did not herself explore this, it is clear that the static conceptualization of 'culture' and 'religion' both help to reinforce the ways in which she (and others) try to think about such difference. That is, her experiences were different from those of the

¹³ And of course there are many different ways in which one can be a 'Muslim' or 'Christian'.

New York Haitians, and the discourses and practices gave her very different assumptions about her own (and others') experiences, but to describe this as placing her between two cultures, or religions, or between religion and non-religion is grossly to over-simplify the scenario. The particularities of the context, of the cultural and religious practices which she saw performed and participated in, are what gives rise to her complex ethnography, which gives a particular view of what is essentialized by many discourses as 'Vodou religion'.

Pursuing Abu-Lughod's critique of culture, therefore, it may be a useful strategy to write against religion, that is, to find other ways of talking about what are thought of as religious manifestations without calling them religions. I think this is a challenging proposition, although a very difficult one. In some respects, it is easier to write against culture rather than religion, learning instead new ways of writing about discourses, practices, and so on. In non-western (non-Christian) contexts it may be possible to follow such a strategy with regard to religion: in places where the abstraction of religious practice is so much a western imposition—where 'religion' and 'culture' are so intertwined—that what is described as religion is as much culture anyway. Indeed, it may even be worth considering removing the term and concept of religion altogether and working on the assumption that what it is used to identify is usually located within discourses of cultural action (that is, within cultural practices and discourses—within culturing).

There are, however, a number of reasons why it is highly unlikely that the term 'religion' (and 'religions') will be abandoned altogether. On a disciplinary level, of course, it would suggest a disbandment of the political domain of religious studies within universities. If religion scholars saw their focus as *cultural practice* rather than *religious practice* then the existence of 'religious studies' would be somewhat like a performance of the play *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark. The practice of the study of religion would therefore need to take place in other departments—whether they be anthropology, cultural studies, sociology, philosophy, or wherever. Putting this prospect aside, there remains a commonly held sense that 'religion' needs to be distinguished as somehow a particular kind of cultural form: perhaps in the same way as 'literature' or 'media' are particular cultural forms that need to be distinguished. This is supported by the very observable fact that religion is not only an 'academic' term, it is used very much on levels of popular and political discourse in most parts

of the world. Religion scholars (particularly scholars of contemporary religious practices) study people who consider themselves to 'have religions'. To extend Baumann's (1997) discussion, it is possible to talk about dominant (constructive) and demotic (deconstructive) discourses on religion. Thus, a writing of religion which attempts not only to write *against* but also to write *out* both culture and religion is probably going too far, and indeed there is a vaguely justifiable case to be made that the concept of 'religion' creates a discursive space which is significant enough to explore.¹⁴ However, the concept of religion does still require some considerable rethinking, with the possibility of abandoning many of the 'taken for granted' ideas (regimes of truth) that those working in the discipline live with on the day-to-day.

5. *Religion as practice*

The concepts of culture and religion have thus received a strong reconsideration in various quarters in recent years, and the same can be said for the long used concept of ritual. In a densely presented theoretical overview of the topic, Catherine Bell's (1992) work on ritual theory and ritual practice brings into question the ways in which ritual is commonly presented as an essentialized form of action. The objectification of 'ritual' as a thing in itself is usually made "to solve the problems posed for scholars by their reliance on a distinction between thought and action" (Bell 1992: 48). This distinction is by no means neutral in itself, since within it there is a fundamental privileging of thought over action: "it differentiates a 'thinking' subject from an 'acting' object—or, when pushed to its logical conclusion, a 'thinking' subject from a 'nonthinking' object" (47). Such an approach is readily observed within traditional studies of religion which look to religious texts and doctrines as the objects of 'religions';¹⁵ but, as Bell shows, this is only partially overcome by the

¹⁴ As a particular type of interdisciplinary project I think there is a lot to be said for the convergence of religious studies as a discipline. This multidisciplinaryity gives the potential for religious studies (departments, conferences, journals, etc.) to be (or become) a useful 'space' for discussions without ever clearly demarcating where the boundaries are meant to lie between religious and other cultural practices (or even if there should be any such boundaries).

¹⁵ Jonathan Spencer (1995: 210) points out how, in the academic study of Buddhism (particularly what has been done by 'textual scholars'), "the Pali canon has

anthropological focus on ritual as a mediator or expressor of thought through action. Where ritual action is considered, it is very often assumed that such ritual is the acting out (or performance) of world views or beliefs.

As a means of overcoming this fundamental dichotomy of thought-action, Bell makes use of Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory which suggests a location of action within thought and vice versa. She focuses in particular on Bourdieu's (1977, 1992) concept of *habitus*, which she glosses as "the set of habitual dispositions through which people 'give shape and form to social conventions'... and the matrix in which objective structures are realized within the (subjective) dispositions that produce practices" (Bell 1992: 79).¹⁶ Thus, she argues, it is more helpful to talk of "the sense of ritual" or "ritualization", which is not some 'thing' which 'does', but is instead itself done (practiced) by actors/agents who strategize and improvise according to context and their own particular circumstances.

I would agree with Bell that this use of practice theory¹⁷ has considerable advantages for any study of religious manifestations (whether they be ritualization, discourses, or even forms of textual and other literate productions). As Stirrat suggests:

understanding what is called 'religion' involves understanding religious practice. By this I mean religion is something which people do: for my purposes it does not exist in so far as people act, speak, and reflect as beings in the world.... [T]he whole field of religious practice has to be viewed as a field of struggle and dispute, as individuals and groups attempt to impose their practices and their understandings on others. And it is through such debate that new forms of religious expression and understanding are created. (1992: 11)

been identified with 'original' and therefore pure Theravada Buddhism, to the systematic exclusion of evidence from archaeology and the vernacular Theravada countries, which might broaden our understanding of the many possible Buddhisms there have been in Buddhist history." In doing so, "ethnographic studies of Buddhism have served to render this identification problematic, even as they reproduce its assumptions." Spencer's underlying premise is that each historically and culturally constructed expression of Theravada Buddhism is as valid as any other (whether it be perceived as 'pure' or otherwise by western scholars or anyone else).

¹⁶ The quote Bell uses is from Anthony Giddens's review of Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (the review was published in *Partisan Review* [1986] 53 [2]). In Bourdieu's own words, *habitus* is described as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations" (1992: 53).

¹⁷ For further consideration of practice theory, see Ortner (1984) and de Certeau (1984).

That is, what tends to be thought of as religion is poorly represented as a distinction between 'belief' (doctrine) and 'ritual', but is (if anything) a continuity of practice that comes together in particular material locations. Such locations are most often people's bodies (through the actions they perform, and the words that they speak; see Asad 1997; Turner 1984), but religious manifestations can also be located in objects (such as texts) and places, such as religious (or sacred) sites (Chidester and Linenthal 1995). However, I would argue that Bell's rephrasing of ritual as ritualization does not go far enough, since although I agree that it is helpful to reconceptualize ritualized practice as ritualization (rather than ritual as an essence), the use of a noun still suggests something tangible that has its own agency, rather than as a form of expressing the agency of the people who actually do the practice.

6. *Religion, religious practice, religioning?*

The concept of religion is as intangible as the concept of culture, and yet academic constructions of both create discourses that encourage scholars to talk as if they are 'things' with tangible forms. Somehow an anthropologist can go to New Guinea and find a people's culture, and a religion scholar can go to India (or read Sanskrit texts) to research Hinduism, Islam, or any other religion and make her/his contribution to our critical understandings of that particular religious tradition. As Baumann notes, the dominant reifying discourse of culture [or religion]-as-a-thing is part of the discourses of the people who are studied, even when at the same time they are being challenged by the counter-demotic discourses of creativity. But the fact that many 'Hindus' consider that they are 'Hindu' makes the study of 'Hinduism' a lot easier to practice. It is possible to deconstruct this, and show that Hinduism is an historical construction that has a particular political history (and very serious contemporary effects), and yet to talk as if Hinduism is 'merely' a discursive creation is to bypass the significance of the concept as part of the popular discursive identities and practices of many ('Hindu') people.

This is not to say that scholars should write the same discourses, nor indeed should they step back from being implicated in helping to shape some aspects of those discourses. Good scholarship should, however, bear in mind that there are different ways of considering a subject, and that an alternative perspective opens up new vistas of

representation and possibly understanding. One possible alternative vista could be borrowed from the discussions of culture, cultural practice, and culturing. That is, I would suggest that religion scholars not only learn to reconsider how they think of culture, but at the same time they should make a similar conceptual shift with their use of the term religion. That is, the practice of religious studies should not be the 'study of religion', but the study of religious practices—of religioning.

If we try to talk of religioning rather than religion the result is a completely different set of expectations. Religioning is not a thing, with an essence, to be defined and explained. Religioning is a form of practice, like other cultural practices, that is done and performed by actors with their own agency (rather than being subsumed by their religions), who have their own particular ways and experiences of making their religiosities manifest. A discourse of religioning also moves away from looking at 'religion' in terms of 'religions' (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.), but instead looks at religious influences and religious creativities, and the political dynamics through which certain conceptualization of religious authenticity are produced and maintained.¹⁸

I would agree very strongly with Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart's argument that all religious manifestations are particular, hybridized/syncretic blends produced by complex historical and cultural interactions, and that "all religions have composite origins and are continually reconstructed through ongoing processes of synthesis and erasure" (1994: 7). Thus what gives a certain complex of religious manifestations the authenticity and the legitimacy of the status of 'religion' is "a discursive matter involving power, rhetoric and persuasion. Thus both putatively pure *and* putatively syncretic traditions can be 'authentic' if people claim that these traditions are unique" (7). A study of religioning moves beyond looking at, for example, how Christianity has been manifest in certain historical eras, and instead focuses on how certain practices have been included and excluded from hegemonic discourses on what Christianity is thought to be. All the various cultural, religious, and political manifestations which have at different times been labeled as 'Christianity'

¹⁸ I find it interesting that there is some congruence between my suggestion to speak of "religion" as a verb (as religioning), and Mary Daly's recommendation that "God" be reconceived as a verb (Daly 1979, quoted in Gold 2000).

are syncretized and authenticated forms of practice. The conceptualizing of religion as religioning in this respect, therefore, focuses on how these different forms of religioning are indeed different from each other, but also how certain political discourses and practices have achieved the valuable status of legitimacy as the same 'thing' (i.e., Christianity).

Similarly, a religioning perspective makes us expect to find the multiple contextual forms of Hinduism that have led western scholars (and students) to despair when they have tried to 'understand' what Hinduism 'is'. The variety of Hindu practices and manifestations is not unique to those who are called (and call themselves) Hindu; an equitable level of diversity of practice and context can be found among the many manifestations of what is considered as 'authentic' Christian religious practice. What is perhaps more remarkable (from a western, christocentric perspective) is that the hegemonizing strategies of certain dominant discourses have not produced such a level of consistency and political unity of religious practice (and religioning) among Hindus as has been the case among other globalizing religious groupings.

The conceptualization of religioning, therefore, is intended to focus scholarly attention on the ways in which religious identities, manifestations and power relations are produced through practice and through performance. Or to put this another way, the subject of study of scholars in this field is such practices, along with the discourses which shape and are shaped by them.

7. Religion, anthropology, and cultural studies

The problematic dialectic between religious studies and postmodern conceptualizations of religion has led some analysts to suggest a subsumation of the discipline with the broader field of cultural studies (Fitzgerald 1995, 1999; King 1999). I do not have too many difficulties with such suggestions, particularly because much of what I have discussed above has come from a similarly fruitful dialogue between anthropology and cultural studies. However, I would like to argue that any such reconstruction of the discipline of religious studies needs to keep in focus the distinctive contributions of contemporary anthropologists as much as those in cultural studies, as well as the marginal areas between the two.

At the level of broad generalization, I would certainly suggest that

an overemphasis on religion/cultural studies at the expense of anthropology would miss out to a large extent on the rich empirical vein in anthropology. Although both approaches are to a large extent discursive, the long tradition in anthropology of fieldwork as a basic component of research very much creates a theoretical outlook that is rooted in actual practices and experiences (of religion, or any other forms of cultural practices). Thus I would still strongly endorse Malinowski's rallying cry to "come down off the verandah" (Malinowski 1978 [1927]), albeit with a critical edge that recognizes the academic and political constructions that are made through the processes of writing up such direct experiences. In general contrast to this I (along with many other anthropologists) find the emphasis on textuality within much of what is considered as cultural studies to be problematic. That is, although texts (whether they be sacred or any other form of literature) are very often extremely important in both the production of various forms of power and knowledge and in the lived experiences of people, the contextualizations of such texts are equally important.

As a rather obvious example of this, it is worth citing Homi Bhabha's much used concept of hybridity (1994), which is drawn from his highly sophisticated and politically aware reading of literary texts—particularly postcolonial texts that were produced out of interactive encounters between people of British and Indian backgrounds. Although the concept of hybridity is an extremely powerful means of discussing cultural complexities (and which offers an alternative slant to what is otherwise called creolization [Hannerz 1992]), Bhabha's stress on the importance of literary texts as loci of hybridity is rather limiting. Such hybridizations occur and come out of a range of discursive and non-discursive practices. Thus, as Peter van der Veer writes:

Bhabha's claim that one can bring newness into the world, that one can reinvent oneself when one is writing from the cultural interstices, is a conceit of the literature-producing and consuming world.... [I]t is crucial to go beyond the analysis of literary discourses and representations to the social, political and economic contexts in which they are embedded. There may be nothing outside of the text, as Derrida proposes, but there is certainly something outside the literary text. (1997: 102, 103)¹⁹

¹⁹ Spivak (1993) and Moore-Gilbert (1997: 82-91) have argued that this interpretation of Derrida is misleading, since Derrida's conceptualization of texts encom-

Discursive analyses of discursive literary texts can provide very useful and complex reconstructions and deconstructions of particular cultural forms, as well as power relations and performances. However, like all other forms of analytic study, such an approach is limited by the fact that they only produce partial truths of complex realities (Clifford 1986). Anthropological practice, no matter where its location, can offer alternatives of discursive analyses of the non-literary practices which engage with and help to shape literary productions.

This tension between anthropology and cultural studies is indeed an important one to address in respect to any reconceptualization of religious studies as a form of cultural studies. The general inclination towards textuality on the part of many cultural studies theorists and writers can have the effect of reproducing a persistent weakness of 'traditional' religious studies: that is the privileging of texts over contexts. I recall overhearing a statement made by a religious studies student at SOAS, London, when in conversation with a friend studying in the anthropology department: when asked how religionists deal with issues of representations of the people they study, the student replied that from her experience "religious studies doesn't have any people, they just have their texts" (Nye 1994). Over the past twenty years there has been a considerable shift away from the view that the study of religion is the study of religious texts, but there remains a substantial school of opinion within the discipline that a sound knowledge of any particular 'religion' or tradition requires a deep philological knowledge of that religion's canonical texts. Indeed the first-wave engagement with anthropology and ethnographic research has helped to produce new perspectives on historical and contemporary contextualities of important texts which are now very much an established part of the 'religious studies' approach.

A shift into a new form of religious/cultural studies which returned to such a privileging of texts would, in my opinion, be a step backwards—even if it did lead to the introduction of theoretically compelling approaches. I would certainly agree that the range of texts for a cultural analysis should be broadened, so that the focus is not only on 'sacred' or canonical texts. Thus, for example, students of

passes the wider sphere of 'context' that is read as lacking in his analysis. Although this defense of Derrida may be justifiable, the over-textuality and under-contextuality of Bhabha is, I believe, a legitimate criticism (although see Bhabha [1990] for an example of his more contextually engaged work).

contemporary western Islam may perhaps need to understand the hermeneutics not only of the Qu'ran and the Sharia, but also of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and its critics.²⁰ But so long as the focus remains exclusively on forms of literature and textuality I would argue that this new approach is merely a creation of an alternative theology of texts, or a postmodern philology. In some cases this approach can and does widen out into studies of hypertextuality and filmic/visual textualities, but the deep contextuality that gives rise to the textualities remain hidden, and to a large extent ignored. What I would argue that anthropological practices can add is that such textual studies can be located within the complex and diverse non-textual (and sometimes non-discursive) practices that help to shape and be shaped by manifest texts.

In this respect, the various shapings, reconceptualizations, and reconstructions of contemporary Islamic practices and identities in Britain cannot be approached with exclusive reference to the text of *The Satanic Verses* (and other writings by Rushdie and his critics) alone. Bhabha's conceptualization of cultural hybridity may work extremely well for a particular person such as Rushdie himself, but gives only a partial view on the multifarious ways in which Islamic practice is actually practiced and conceived in British contexts in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair. By privileging Rushdie's particular form of hybridity, other less literate (and indeed less bourgeois) forms of hybridity are marginalized.

The practice of anthropology is itself prone to lead to a privileging of certain groups and concepts and marginalizing others, as was of course shown most clearly by the critiques that emerged out of the *Writing Culture* debates. Anthropologists can claim to speak for 'others' (that is, those in other cultures), and yet in doing so help to construct the sense of otherness that they are claiming to breakdown (Asad 1986; Fabian 1983). However, the meeting ground between anthropology and cultural studies has produced a very rich field of theoretic-

²⁰ Indeed a case could almost be made that *The Satanic Verses* has itself become a 'sacred text' for postmodern and postcolonial theorists. This is not so much in terms of any theological position that the author Rushdie presents, but rather with respect to his narrativization of the forms of cultural hybridization and newness that writers such as Homi Bhabha have articulated in more academic terms. The number of times that Rushdie's volume is cited and shown deference to by citation (or worshiped?) within this particular discursive is certainly a point worth extended consideration.

cal and methodological engagements that have created a large measure of critical reflection on the discursive and political contextualities of the empirical research through which cultural contextualizations are generated.²¹ It is precisely within this general field that I would recommend that the discipline of religious studies be developed, rather than risk the very real possibility that the academic production of knowledge within the discipline become increasingly isolated from other humanities subject approaches. Thus, to paraphrase the anthropologist Terence Turner:

If [religious studies] is going to make a contribution to the new academic approaches to culture emerging out of cultural studies and multiculturalist curricula, it will not be by simply sitting still and waiting to be consulted because we had [religion and] culture first. [Religionists] will have to engage actively and critically with multiculturalist formulations to demonstrate that they have valuable theoretical points and relevant critical perspectives to contribute. (1993: 421)²²

Just as anthropologists have had to open up their perspectives and accept the inevitable problematics with their 'culture concept', so too those who profess a study a religion also need to do some serious rethinking of what kinds of entities they are trying to talk about with the concept of 'religion'. Whether the reconceptualization produces a new discursive terminology of religious practice or religioning is less important that a broad recognition that the types of practices that are debated within the disciplinary field are significant elements of cultural, national, and political constructions in many different global and local contexts (or ethnoscapas [Appardurai 1991]). However, to communicate with those in other disciplinary fields such as cultural studies, postcolonial studies, poststructuralism, and anthropology, there needs to be a recognition that 'our' (religious studies) discourses need to accommodate developments outside.

In conclusion, therefore, I would suggest that there are three possible ways in which religious studies could develop to meet these

²¹ As examples of written products of this discursive field I would recommend the journals *Public Culture*, *Cultural Anthropology*, and *American Anthropologist*, collections of papers by Richard Fox (1991), Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997), James Clifford (1997), as well as the outline of possible research agendas discussed in the final chapter of Gerd Baumann's book on multiculturalism (1999).

²² The substituted words in this quote are 'religious studies' for 'anthropology' and 'religionists' for 'anthropologists'. My hope is that the polemical advice is as relevant for the audience that I am addressing as it was for Turner's audience of a 'mainstream' cultural anthropology journal.

challenges of postmodern critiques of the subject. One possibility is the one I discussed above, that is, by accepting that religion departments have been too artificially constructed around an anachronistic object of study. That is, there is no place for seeing religion as something separate from other cultural manifestations, and thus (in a sense) dissolve religious studies into the meeting ground between cultural studies and anthropology.

The second possibility, a little less radical but still transformative of the discipline, would be to recreate religious studies as an adjunct of this interdisciplinary project, as something like 'religion and culture'. This would add a cross-cultural global edge which could provide a useful critique of some of the narrow parochialism (both ethnocentric and Eurocentric) of a number of poststructuralist and postmodern debates. The third possibility—which I am particularly suggesting in this paper—is that there should at least be a rethinking of the vocabulary and discourse of the discipline, that is, to think of and discuss religion as something which is done, as a practice, as religioning.

University of Stirling

References

- Abu-Lughod, Lila (1991). Writing against culture. In R. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun (1986). Theory in anthropology: Center and periphery. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20: 356-361.
- (1991). Global ethnoscapes: Notes and queries for a transnational anthropology. In R. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- (1996a). Here and now. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (1996b). The production of locality. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Asad, Talal (1973). *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. London: Ithaca Press.
- (1983). Anthropological conceptions of religion: Reflections on Geertz. *Man: Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 18: 237-59.
- (1986). The concept of cultural translation in British social anthropology. In J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. London: University of California Press.
- (1993). The construction of religion as an anthropological category. In *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- (1997). Remarks on the anthropology of the body. In S. Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Baumann, Gerd (1999). *The Multicultural Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*. New York: Routledge.
- Bell, Catherine (1992). *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi (1990). The third space. In J. Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Richard Nice (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1992). *The Logic of Practice*. Richard Nice (trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chidester, David (1996). Anchoring religion in the world: A southern African history of comparative religion. *Religion* 26 (2): 141-159.
- (1998). No first or final solutions: Strategies, techniques, and Ivan Strenski's garden in the study of religion. *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 66 (2): 369-376.
- Chidester, David and Edward Linenthal (eds.) (1995). Introduction. In *American Sacred Space*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Clarke, Peter B. and Peter Byrne (1993). *Religion Defined and Explained*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Clifford, James (1983). On ethnographic authority. *Representations* 2: 118-146.
- (1986). Introduction: Partial truths. In J. Clifford and G. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. London: University of California Press.
- (1997). *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, James and George Marcus (eds.) (1986). *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. London: University of California Press.
- Daly, Mary (1979). Why speak about God? In Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (eds.), *Womanspirit Rising*. New York: HarperCollins.
- de Certeau, Michel (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Steven Rendall (trans.). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fabian, Johannes (1983). *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Favret-Saada, Jeanne (1980). *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fitzgerald, Tim (1995). Religious studies as cultural studies: A philosophical and anthropological critique of the concept of religion. *Diskus: A Disembodied Journal of Religion* 3 (1): 35-47. [http://www.uni-marburg.de/fb11/religionswissenschaft/journal/diskus]
- (1997). Critique of religion as a cross-cultural category. *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 9 (2): 91-110.
- (1999). *The Ideology of Religious Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gellner, Ernest (1992). *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*. London: Routledge.
- Geertz, Armin (1994). On reciprocity and mutual reflection in the study of native American religions. *Religion* 24 (1): 1-22.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973a). Religion as a cultural system. In *The Interpretation of Culture*. London: Fontana [reprinted in 1993].
- (1973b). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The Interpretation of Culture*. London: Fontana [reprinted in 1993].
- Gold, Ann Grodzins (2000). Everywhere you go...: Response to editorial. *Culture and Religion*. 1(1).
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson (eds) (1997). *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. London: Duke University Press.

- Hannerz, Ulf (1992). *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Heelas, Paul (ed.) (1998). *Religion, Modernity, and Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- James, Allison and Jennifer Hockey (1998). *After Writing Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Keesing, Roger (1994). Theories of culture revisited. In Robert Borofsky (ed.), *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*, 301-312. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- King, Richard (1999). *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India, and the 'Mystic East'*. London: Routledge.
- Lambek, Michael (1995). Choking on the Qu'ran, and other consuming parables from the western Indian Ocean front. In Wendy James (ed.), *The Pursuit of Certainty*, 258-281. London: Routledge.
- Leach, Edmund (1969). Virgin birth. In *Genesis as Myth and other essays*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Lincoln, Bruce (2000) Culture. In Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religion*. New York: Cassell Academic Press.
- Malinowski, Bronislaw (1978) [1927]. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Marcus, George and Michael Fisher (1986). *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mascia-Lees, Frances, Patricia Sharpe, and Colleen Ballerino Cohen (1989). The postmodernist turn in anthropology: Cautions from a feminist perspective. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 15 (1): 7-33.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko (1998). Culture. In Mark C. Taylor (ed.), *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McCarthy Brown, Karen (1991). *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- McCauley, Robert N. and E. Thomas Lawson (1996). Who owns 'culture'? *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 8 (2): 171-190.
- McCutcheon, Russell (1999). *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*. London: Cassell Academic Press.
- Moore, Henrietta (1994). In The divisions within: Sex, gender, and sexual difference. *A Passion for Difference*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Moore-Gilbert, Bart (1997). *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*. London: Verso.
- Nye, Malory (1994). Debating point: Anthropology and the study of religion. *Bulletin of the British Association for the Study of Religion* 72 (June): 17-21.
- Okely, Judith (1996). *Own or Other Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Ortner, Sherry (1984). Theory in anthropology since the sixties. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 18: 126-166.
- Pals, Daniel (1996). *Seven Theories of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Said, Edward (1978). *Orientalism*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- (1989). Representing the colonized: Anthropology's interlocutors. *Critical Inquiry* 15: 205-225.
- Scott, David (1992). Conversion and demonism: Colonial Christian discourse and religion in Sri Lanka. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (2): 331-365.
- Shaw, Rosalind and Charles Stewart (1994). Introduction: Problematizing syncretism. In Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw (eds.), *Syncretism/ Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. (1982). *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Smith, Wilfred. Cantwell (1978). *The Meaning and End of Religion*. London. SPCK.

- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1993). Can the subaltern speak? In P. Williams and L. Chrisman (eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Stewart, Charles and Rosalind Shaw (eds.) (1994). *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. London: Routledge.
- Strenski, Ivan (1998). Religion, power, and final Foucault. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66 (2): 345-367.
- Taylor, Mark C. (ed.) (1998). *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, Bryan (1984). *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Turner, Terence (1993). Anthropology and multiculturalism: What is anthropology that multiculturalists should be mindful of it? *Cultural Anthropology* 8 (4): 411-429.
- Tylor, Edward B. (1871). *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Customs*. London: Murray.
- van der Veer, Peter (1997). "The enigma of arrival": Hybridity and authenticity in the global space. In P. Werbner and T. Modood (eds.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*. London: Zed Books.
- White, Leslie (1949). *The Science of Culture*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.