

Neena Mahadev

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ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Professor, Yale-NUS College, Singapore

Cultural Anthropology, Social Sciences Division, July 2017 – present

Associate Editor, *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, August 2016–Present

Research Fellow, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity

Religious Diversity Department, Göttingen, October 2015 – July 2017

Research project: “Itineraries of Religious Arrival and Revival: Multi-ethnic Religious Spaces in Singapore and Sri Lanka.”

Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Göttingen

Trans-regional Research Network (CETREN), October 2013 – September 2015

Working group on “The Politics of Secularism and the Emergence of New Religiosities”, a collaboration between the Centers for Modern Indian and for Modern East Asian Studies

EDUCATION

PhD Johns Hopkins University, Anthropology, degree conferred October 2013

Dissertation title: “Buddhist Nationalism, Christian Evangelism, and the Rearticulations of Conflict and Belonging in Postwar Sri Lanka.” Defense hearing result: unconditional pass

Dissertation Committee and External Examiners: Veena Das, Jane Guyer, Naveeda Khan, William E. Connolly (Political Theory, JHU), John D. Kelly (Anthropology, U. Chicago)

MA and ABD qualified December 2008. Comprehensive exam essay titles:

“Two Forms of Vision—one Enlightened and one Enchanted: Reason and Ineffability as Vicissitudes of Religious Pluralism”

“Selfish Giving?: Theravāda Buddhism and her Mahāyāna Buddhist and Christian Critics”

MA University of Chicago, Social Sciences, degree conferred August 29, 2003

MA thesis title: “The Dialogics of Class and Ethnic Identity Politics within Sri Lanka’s Tamil Plantation Community: Nationalisms, Unions, and the Struggle for Representation”

BA Carleton College, Sociology/Anthropology, concentration South Asian Studies, 2000

Awarded the *Dave Okada Memorial Prize award in the social sciences*, and academic distinction for Comprehensive Thesis

PUBLICATIONS

The Maverick Dialogics of Religious Rivalry in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Inspiration and Contestation in a New Messianic Buddhist Movement. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. March 2016.

Conversion and Anti-Conversion in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Christian Evangelism and Theravāda Buddhist Views of the Ethics of Religious Attraction, in *Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in Contemporary Asia*, Finucane, Feener (eds). Singapore: ARI Springer. 2014.

Currently Under Review

Economies of Conversion and Ontologies of Difference: *Karma*, Grace, and Adversarial Political Perception in Sri Lanka. Under review with *Current Anthropology*.

Karma & Grace: Rivalrous Reckonings of Fortune and Misfortune. Under review with *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, special issue on ‘Cosmologies of Life.’

Postwar Blood: Sacrifice, Anti-Sacrifice, and Inter-Religious Relations in Sri Lanka. Under review with *Comparative Studies in History and Anthropology*.

Trans-regional Revival and Agonistic Religiosity: Buddhism and Christianity in South and Southeast Asia. Under review for a special issue on *Secularisms in Southeast Asia*, edited by Peter van der Veer and Kenneth Dean. Global Diversities series, *Palgrave Press*.

Under Preparation

Karma and Grace: Buddhist-Christian Rivalry and Conversion Politics in Millennial Sri Lanka. Book manuscript.

Siting Pluralism: an Introduction to special section (co-authored with Jeremy F. Walton). Under Preparation for submission to *Religion & Society: Advances in Research*.

Modulating Miracles, Defending Sovereignty: Petrine and Pauline Theologies and the Obligations of Sri Lankan Nationalism. Under preparation.

No Sympathy for the Devil: ‘Spiritual Warfare in the Spectrum of Christian Approaches to Religious Difference. Under preparation.

Book Reviews

“Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture of Sri Lanka and Australia,” by Bruce Kapferer. New and Revised Edition, Berghahn Books 2012. For *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. September 2013 issue.

“Language, Creativity, and Charisma: Ritual Life in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal” by Thomas Csordas. Re-release, Palgrave Press 2012. For *Anthropology News*. Online at: <http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2013/05/01/review-of-language-charisma-and-creativity-ritual-life-in-the-catholic-charismatic-renewal/>

“The Golden Wave: Culture and Politics after Sri Lanka’s Tsunami Disaster” by Michele Gamburd. Indiana University Press, 2013. For *Journal of Modern Asian Studies*. May 2015 issue.

RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS & AWARDS

Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, Dissertation Fieldwork Grant, 2009

Awarded funds for ethnographic fieldwork “Buddhist and Christian Ethical Endeavors: Charitable Works, Conversions, and Unstable Religious Commitments in Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka”

National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship, 2004—2007

Awarded competitive fellowship for early stages of doctoral study at Johns Hopkins University, Department of Anthropology.

Dean’s Teaching Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University, 2012

Awarded Fellowship to design and teach an undergraduate seminar-style class during Fall 2012.

Philanthropic Educational Organization (PEO), Scholar Award, 2010

Fellowship awarded to finalize fieldwork, 2010-11.

Mellon Language Fellowship, Johns Hopkins University, 2008

For advanced language study in the Sinhala Language.

Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship Recipient, Summers 2007 & 2008

For study of Sinhala Language, at the Madison South Asia Language Institute.

Women, Gender and Sexuality Program, Travel Grant, Johns Hopkins University, Summer 2005

For preliminary Ethnographic Field Research in Sri Lanka

Fulbright Fellowship (Post-Baccalaureate), Sri Lanka, October 2000 - July 2001

Academic Distinction, Carleton College for Senior Comprehensive Exam Research (BA thesis)

Dave Okada Memorial Prize in the Social Sciences, Carleton College, 2000.

“Awarded annually to the social sciences major who has demonstrated the most remarkable intellectual achievement in his or her studies”.

INVITED AS PEER REVIEWER

European Research Council, Starting Grant proposal evaluator, remote reviewer, 2017

HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory (Associate Editor, 2016-2018)

Cultural Anthropology

Modern Asian Studies

Journal of Asian Studies

Religion and Society: Advances in Research

Nations and Nationalism

Religions

Borderlands

INVITED LECTURES**National University of Singapore, South Asian Studies Program, March 2016**

Conversion Economies and Ontologies of Difference: *Karma*, Grace, and the Politics of Nationalist Perception in Sri Lanka.

University of California, Riverside, Department of Religious Studies, January 2015

Paper title: “Modulating Miracles, Defending Sovereignty: Petrine and Pauline Theologies and the Obligations of Sri Lankan Nationalism”

University of Durham, UK, Department of Theology and Religion, January 2015

Paper title: “Catholic Charismatic Revival (Sinhala *Pubudurwa* Movement), and the Negotiations of Political Perception in Postwar Sri Lanka”

Augustana College, Rock Island, IL, Department of Religion, February 2015

Paper title: “No Sympathy for the Devil: ‘Persecution Complexes,’ and the Spectrum of Evangelical-Ecumenical Approaches to Religious Difference”

NYU Department of Anthropology and the Religious Studies Program, February 2014

Paper title: “‘Fraudulent’ Christians amongst Sinhala Buddhist Skeptics: Conversion Economies and the Politics of Perception in Sri Lanka”

International Center for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo, Sri Lanka, April 2011

Paper title: “Buddhist Nationalism and Christian Evangelism: An Ethnographic Contextualization of the Controversies over Conversion, Proselytism and Perceived Religious Persecution in Sri Lanka”

CONFERENCE, WORKSHOP AND ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPATION**Innovative Religiosities in Post-war Sri Lanka, Open University, Colombo, July 2017**

Sponsored by the National Science Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation, organized by Dr. Mark Whitaker.

Paper title: Post-war Blood: Sacrifice & Anti-Sacrificial Politics in Post-war Sri Lanka

American Anthropological Association Meetings, November 2016

Paper title: Revelation and Religious Futures in Singapore.

Panel co-organizer: The Politics of Revelation

Sacrifice, Vitality, and Utopia Workshop, sponsored by European Association for Social Anthropology (EASA), HAU, and University of Bergen. June 2016.

Paper title: Postwar Blood: Sacrifice, Anti-Sacrifice, and Inter-Religious Relations in Sri Lanka

**Temple Networks in Southeast Asia Workshop, Asia Research Institute, NUS, Singapore
March 2016**

Paper title: Transregional Economies of Religious Commitment: notes on Buddhist & Christian religious Networks in Singapore & Sri Lanka

American Anthropological Association Meetings, November 2015

Paper title: “Conversion Economies and Ontologies of Difference: *Karma*, Grace, and Adversarial Political Perception in Postwar Sri Lanka”

Panelist on “Strange Self: Exploration of Mind through Buddhism and Christianity”

Religious Networks in Southeast Asia Workshop, Max Planck, Göttingen, June 2015

Presentation of Project Plan: Itineraries of Arrival & Revival: Buddhism & Christianity in Singapore & Sri Lanka

Siting Pluralism: Practices of Religious Difference, University of Göttingen, January 2015

Workshop co-convener (with Jeremy Walton, keynote Winnifred Sullivan),

American Anthropological Association Meetings, December 2014

Chair for a panel entitled, *Mediation, Circulation, and the Social*

Paper title: Rivalrous Circulations and Mediated Affects: the Competitive “Sting” of Evangelical Urgencies and Buddhist Nationalist Anxieties in Sri Lanka

43rd Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, WI, October 2014

Panel entitled, *Accommodating Religious Identity, Governing Religious Difference*

Paper title: “Modulating Miracles, Defending Sovereignty: Christianities and the Obligations of Sri Lankan Nationalism”

Religion and Nationalism Workshop, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Ethnic & Religious Diversity, Göttingen, May 2014

Invited by the Governance of Diversity Research Group to present at a workshop on religion and nationalism, with Prof. Genevieve Zubrzycki (U. Michigan) as discussant.

42nd Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, WI, October 2013

Presenter on panel entitled, *Spaces of Utopia Out of South Asia*, organized by Dr. Smriti Srinivas

Paper title: “Christian ‘Spiritual Warfare’ and Postwar Territoriality in Sri Lanka”

Society for the Anthropology of Religion, Biennial Meeting, Pasadena, CA April, 2013

Presenter on a panel on *Political Theologies*, organized by Dr. Mayfair Yang.

Paper title: “Modulating Miracles, Defending Sovereignty: Petrine and Pauline Theologies and the Obligations of Sri Lankan Nationalism”

Association for Asian Studies, Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA March 2013

“‘Fraudulent’ Christians: a New Formation within the Politics of Sinhala Buddhist Perception”

“Charity, Philanthropy and Development” roundtable sponsored by the Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex, in Colombo, Sri Lanka, July 2013

Paper title: “Selfish giving? Buddhist and Christian charity in the context of inter-religious rivalry.”

American Anthropological Association 111th Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA, November 2012

Paper title: “An Emergent Theravāda Buddhist Millennialism?”

Panel entitled “Apocalyptic Visions: Reflections on Crossing the Ultimate Boundary”

41st Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, Wisconsin, October, 2012

Panel Organizer and presenter for panel entitled: “Making Merit, Fortifying the Nation: Ritual Currencies of Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka”

Paper title: “The Maverick Dialogics of Religious Rivalry in Sri Lanka: An Emergent and Contested Theravāda Buddhist Messianism”

Discussant for a panel entitled “Risking a Claim: Language, Acknowledgment and the Everyday.”

“Sri Lanka in the World, the World in Sri Lanka,” Roundtable at University of Zurich, Department of Human Geography, November, 2011

Invited to deliver a paper on nationalist perspectives on Christian evangelism and current geopolitical conditions of Sri Lanka.

Paper title: “Buddhist Nationalism and the Evangelical Christian ‘Gifts’ of Attraction: The Ethics and Politics of Inter-Religious Encounters”

“Christianity in the History of India,” Conference at Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, February 2011

Paper title: “National, Transnational, or Anti-National?: Perceptions of Religious and National Belonging in the Varieties of Sri Lankan Christianities.”

“Proselytizing and the Limits of Religious Pluralism in the Era of Globalization,” Workshop at Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, September 2010

Paper title: “Conversion and Anti-Conversion in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Christian Evangelism and the Theravāda Buddhist View of the Ethics of Religious Attraction.”

Society for the Anthropology of Religion Conference, Phoenix, AZ, April 2007

Paper title: “Ordinary Ethics and the Problem of Conversion by way of ‘Allurement’: A View through the Practical-Theological Lens of Sri Lankan Buddhist and Hindu Piety.”

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2015 Guest Lecture: “How do Christians Talk to their God? Vernacular and Sacred Language in Global Christianities,” Religion Department, Augustana College

**2012 “Christianities in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” Lecturer and Dean’s Teaching Fellow
Johns Hopkins University**

Awarded a competitive fellowship to teach a one-semester undergraduate course of my design. Course description: In its evangelical spread, Christianity has taken many forms. What does it mean to be “Saved” in different social and cultural contexts? How has Christianity been embraced, rejected, or “syncretically” incorporated into local structures of religious belief and practice?

**2011 “Gift and Sacrifice,” Teaching Assistant, with Professor Juan Obarrio
Johns Hopkins University**

Course description: “How do gifts become the foundation of society? What is the meaning of the ritual sacrifice of living beings and things? The course examines classical and contemporary anthropological explorations of circulation, exchange, of power, dread and desire.”

2011 Study Leader, University of Chicago Alumni Association tour of India

Delhi, Jaipur, Ranthambore, Agra, Varanasi, Sarnath. October – November 2011

Hired as University of Chicago alumni representative and Study Leader for a small group tour of several northern Indian cities and villages, in association with Odysseys Unlimited and University of Chicago Alumni Relations Office. Delivered lectures and had informal conversations with alumni on Hinduism and Buddhism, pilgrimage and sacred cosmology of Varanasi, mysticism, caste, sectarian conflict and co-existence, and the struggle for India’s independence from British colonialism, in cooperation with the Odysseys Tour Director.

**2007 “Religions of the World: an Introduction,” Co-Lecturer
Johns Hopkins University**

Co-designed and co-taught course to introduce undergraduates to the anthropology of religion.

Course description: “This course offers an exploration of some of the world's major religions, including Hindu traditions, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, so-called pagan religions, and indigenous religions of Africa and other regions of the world. We offer key concepts and terms in the study of religion, a sampling of doctrinal and orthodox views of various religious traditions, as well as a view of how these religions are practiced heterodoxically in a variety of local contexts in the contemporary world.”

**2006 “Kinship,” Teaching Assistant, with Professor Sonia Ryang
Johns Hopkins University**

Course introduced undergraduate students to the anthropological study of kinship.

**2006 “Africa in the 21st Century,” Teaching Assistant, with Professor Jane Guyer
Johns Hopkins University**

Course description: “The present and future of Africa are often projected in apocalyptic terms. We attempt here to understand the ordinary realities of life—family, making a living, community, religion, congregation, governance and inequality—with special attention to African scholars, public figures, writers and artists.” We concentrated our energies especially on ethnographic material that highlighted everyday life and new developments in African cities.

OTHER WORK & SERVICE

2006-07 Chair, Graduate Representative Organization (GRO), Johns Hopkins University

Elected to serve as the Chair of the Graduate Representative Organization, which advocates for graduate student concerns at Johns Hopkins University.

2007-08 Academic Policy Coordinator, GRO, Johns Hopkins University

Served as the GRO Academic Policy Coordinator to advise Deans of the University on academic policies that affected graduate students. Elected to the position by other graduate students involved in the organization.

2002-03 Scholar At-Risk Network, Case Manager, The Human Rights Program University of Chicago

Responsible for managing confidential case files of scholars from various regions of the world who were experiencing harassment, violence, and threats to their lives and to their academic freedom. Work entailed finding possible fellowship exchanges for scholars, offering them temporary refuge and possibility for academic growth, with the aim of allowing the scholars to return to their home countries providing that it was safe for them to do so.

1999-00 Writing Tutor, *The Write Place*, Carleton College

Tutored students in history and anthropology courses to help them develop effective writing skills. Nominated for position based upon strong writing and interpersonal skills.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCIES

Sinhala – Advanced

South Asia Summer Language Institute UW-Madison (2006 & 07), private lessons in Sri Lanka (2009-10)

Tamil – Intermediate

University of Chicago (one semester, 2002), South Asia Summer Language Institute (2004 & 05)

French – Intermediate

High School and University-level study (1994-1998)

German – Beginning

University of Göttingen (one semester, 2014)

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Anthropological Association

American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies

Society for the Anthropology of Religion

Network for Ethnographic Theory (HAU-N.E.T.)

American Academy of Religion

European Association for Social Anthropology

American Ethnological Society