American popular culture has always been enamored with blue-eyed soul, rewarding it to the detriment and exclusion of the very black artists who pioneered these musical traditions.

Dr. Brittney Cooper - Rutgers University, Cosmopolitan.com on Adele’s win of Album of the Year for 25 over Lemonade by Beyonce

I dream it, I work hard, I grind ’til I own it,
I twirl on them haters, albino alligators.
Beyonce Knowles “Formation,” Lemonade

In year seven, SORAAAD will focus on appropriation. How is appropriation defined with respect to power and consumption? How is appropriation considered an act of interpretation and exchange? How are appropriation and its contestation meaningful for those we study? What do instances or ongoing acts of appropriation tell us about the politics of representation and classification? In this workshop we will consider the implicit and overt acts of exogenous and endogenous appropriation deployed by the subjects of our research, as well as those that we deploy ourselves when designing qualitative research. We shall look at appropriation as a function of exchange, agency, erasure, classification, and power. Jamel Velji, Annette Yoshiko Reed, Jennifer Knust, Sean McCloud, and Ipsita Chatterjea will address the erasure of the Islamic origins of coffee, Judaism and Christianity in Antiquity, plunder, looting, and the Bible, avenues for assessing mixing and power in new religious movements, and the endogenous appropriation and erasure of Black women’s labor. Finally, we will discuss how we as scholars cite, borrow, and adapt from other scholars.

Religious studies is an interdisciplinary field. But does its status as such justify our sometimes undisciplined mechanisms of “borrowing” – methodological, topical, conceptual, or otherwise – from other fields? We routinely witness scholarly acts of appropriation silence points made by other scholars and also ignore their standards for substantiation. To move beyond our own acts of appropriation by name-dropping, can we begin to talk about what we owe to other religion scholars and scholarship in other disciplines by way of disciplined adaptations? Can we justify our borrowings such that they might be viewed as sensible adaptations and complementary or logical extensions by those from whom we have borrowed?
Participants and panelists in this year’s workshop will explore questions crucial both to their areas of specialization and to religious studies as a discipline. How can we track the varied and dynamic ways that ‘appropriation’ morphs as an assertion of hegemony across space and time? How do we relate event specific studies of relatively small populations to larger discourses without distorting particular expressions as either definitively representative or dismissible as insufficient evidence? Who gets to appropriate without stigma? How do we track and contextualize fixations on specific narratives, persistent erasures, and outcomes? To what end and with what pivots can we productively compare observed appropriation and scholarly appropriation? In the case of the latter, how can we self-check a tendency to invoke theories and other disciplines developed in other contexts without clarifying the context of exchange and carrying out the methodological labor demanded by these approaches? How do we continue to integrate research that demonstrates how appropriation has warped our study of religions both in- and outside a “Western context,” e.g., by privileging some forms to the detriment of scholarly understandings of factionalisms, esotericisms, indigenous religions, fictional religions, and new religions?

“Appropriation and the Analytical Study of Religion” will be of interest to scholars who already enact social science and critical humanities research methodologies; to those who want to develop techniques to denaturalize appropriation and examine the nature of acquisition and deployments of culture where exchange overlooks power imbalances; and to anyone who wants to rethink how appropriation manifests, functions, and is used to normalize activity within specifically heterogeneous power structures.

SORAAAD and University of Regina Religion Department

SORAAAD 2017 is also co-sponsored by Northeastern University.

Registration Opens August 7, 2017. Please send an email to soraaad@gmail.com. Place “registration” in the subject line, and include your name, indication of rank (independent scholar, graduate student, professor etc.) in the body of the email.

Participation Limit: 40 . Registration is free, but required.

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