

ERIN K. NOURSE

PhD, University of Virginia

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EDUCATION

PhD, University of Virginia

PhD in Religious Studies

December 2014

Masters in Religious Studies

August 2011

Trinity University

B.A. in Religion, second major in Sociology, minor in French

May 2005

SPECIALIZATION

Primary: **African Indigenous Religions**

Secondary: **Islam, Christianity in Africa**

CURRENT RESEARCH

My current research, *Water into Bones: Birth Rituals, Ancestors, and Religious Hybridity in a Northern Malagasy Port Town* is an ethnography of the religious practices around birthing and infant care in northern Madagascar. In it, I highlight the particular processes by which Malagasy “instill bones” in their children (read: provide them with a sense of enduring worth) by way of haircutting ceremonies, rituals of baptism and circumcision, and through the use of “growth medicines” (*aody be*), teething necklaces, and special jewelries meant to embed the newly born in the powerful legacies of their ancestors. The setting for this research is the northern port city of Diégo Suarez, Madagascar, and thus offers a window into the rich religious diversity prevalent in Madagascar’s urban spaces. My book weaves together a broad re-telling of the history of northern Madagascar – the traditions that East African, Arab, and Asian migrants brought to the island over the last two millennia; the colonial and post-colonial contexts that shape hybridized religious and lineage-based identities; and the ritual innovations of young Malagasy today whose customs are at once a nod to the ancestors and also a severing of ties with the ancestors as a result of newer Pentecostal and Charismatic religious worldviews.

PUBLICATIONS AND BOOK REVIEWS

“Women and the History of Religion in Africa.” In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*. Oxford University Press, 2016—. Article published January 22, 2021.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.368>.

“Hosting a First Haircutting in Diégo Suarez, Madagascar” in *Everyday Life on the African Continent*, Ohio University Press, 2019.

“Turning ‘Water Babies’ (Zaza Rano) into ‘Real Human Beings’ (Vrai Humains): Rituals of Blessing for the Newly Born in Diégo Suarez, Madagascar,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 47, 2: 2018.

“In Pursuit of Prosperity: Prostitution and Pentecostalism in a Malagasy Port Town,” Review of Cole, Jennifer, *Sex and Salvation: Imagining the Future in Madagascar*. H-Histsex, H-Net Reviews. March 2013.

CONFERENCE PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS

- “Religion and Sexuality in Uganda”: An Historical Perspective,” **Guest Lecturer in African Civilizations Course, University of Denver**, Denver, Colorado, 2016.
- “‘Make My Hands Holy’: How Gift-Giving (*Hasin-Tanana*) and the Malagasy Ethic of Reciprocity (*Fibavanana*) Equips Traditional Healers to Provide Clients with Much Needed Therapeutic Resources in Regions of Medical Scarcity,” **American Academy of Religion Annual Conference**, Atlanta, 2015 [Conference missed due to illness]
- “‘Syncretism’ in the Christian Kingdom of Kongo?,” **Guest Lecturer in Imagining Christian Practice Course, Iliff School of Theology**, Denver, Colorado, 2015
- “Delivering More Than Babies: Understanding the Role of Traditional Midwives in Diego Suarez, Madagascar,” **10th Madagascar Workshop**, Montreal, 2015
- “Adorn Them with Amulets or Exorcise Them of Evil? How Malagasy Shepherd Healers are Changing the Religious Landscape of Madagascar,” **African Studies Association Annual Conference**, Baltimore, 2013
- “Doctor, Diviners and Midwives: Consulting Medical and Religious Specialists,” **Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies (Chapter Workshop)**, Charlottesville, Virginia, 2013
- “Turning ‘Water Babies’ into ‘Real Human Beings’: Post-partum Rituals for Achieving Health in Mothers and Infants in Northern Madagascar,” **American Academy of Religion Annual Conference**, Chicago, 2012
- “Turning ‘Water Babies’ into ‘Real Human Beings’: Post-partum Rituals for Achieving Health in Mothers and Infants in Northern Madagascar,” **African Studies Colloquium at the University of Virginia**, Charlottesville, Virginia, 2012
- “Post-partum Rituals: Making Mothers who will Bless their Babies,” **Carter G. Woodson Institute for African and African American Studies (Chapter Workshop)**, Charlottesville, Virginia, 2012
- “Pills, Plants or Knives under their Pillows? Religious and Medical Strategies for Raising Healthy Babies in Madagascar,” **African Studies Association Annual Conference**, Philadelphia, 2012

FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

Pre-doctoral Fellowship (Carter Woodson Institute for African and African-American Studies), two-year dissertation writing fellowship: 2012-2014

Frank L. Hereford, Jr. Presidential Fellowship (Graduate School of Arts and Sciences), five-year merit based fellowship awarded to incoming graduate students who demonstrate “superb” potential: 2007-2011

Skinner Scholarship (University of Virginia James H. Skinner Memorial Scholarship Fund), leadership and community service scholarship: 2008-2010

Summer Foreign Language Institute Fellowship (Graduate School of Arts and Sciences), used to study Malagasy at University of Antsirananana in Madagascar: summer of 2008

Summer Language Scholarship (Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Society of Fellows) used to study Advanced Swahili at the Summer Cooperative African Language Institute hosted by Michigan State University: summer of 2009

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Assistant Professor, Regis University

August 2017 – present

Teach courses for the foundational core including “Religion and the Human Quest” and “Writing Analytically” and developed a new course for the integrative core entitled “Interfaith Justice and Peacemaking.” I also teach “African Diaspora Religions,” “Method and Theory in the Study of Religion,” “Ritual,” and “Interfaith Dialogue.”

Term Instructor, Regis University

August 2016 – May 2017

Taught seven courses including introductory comparative religion course exploring humans’ relationship to the sacred, “Religion and the Human Quest,” intermediate-level course exploring issues of faith and justice that arise as the center of gravity within Christianity shifts to the Global South, “Faith and Justice in World Christianity,” and an upper level course exploring the phenomenon of ritual within the religious experience, “Ritual.”

Instructor, Regis University

August 2015 - May 2016

Religion and the Human Quest (RT201)

Designed syllabus, led daily discussions, designed and graded all assignments for incoming first-year students. This course examines the human condition in relation to the sacred. Course texts included religion scholar Stephen Prothero’s *God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Rule the World*; ethnographer Karen McCarthy Brown’s *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, comparative literature professor Mohja Kahf’s *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*, Jesuit Priest Gregory Boyle’s *Tattoos on the Heart*, and the Gospel of Luke.

Instructor, Iliff School of Theology

January-March 2016

Anglicanism in Africa (IST 2145 - 1)

Designed syllabus, recorded lectures, and facilitated weekly discussion threads for online course. Course units include Missionary Anglicanism and its Reception in sub-Saharan Africa (1700s –1920s); Independence Movements, Anglican Awakenings, and the Struggle for Liberation from Apartheid (1930s-1990s); and Reframing the “Crisis” within the Worldwide Anglican Communion: Issues of theology, sexuality and Euro-American hegemony.

Instructor, University of Denver

September-November 2015

Gender and Religion in Africa and the Diaspora (GWST 2700-1)

Designed syllabus, lectured and led daily discussions, designed and graded all assignments for undergraduate students. This course follows a thematic (non-regional) approach as students

examine case studies relating to the construction, performance and contestation of gender identity; issues of power and religious authority; sexuality and sexual ethics; and queer and transgender identities among practitioners of African religions and African-inspired religions in the Americas.

Instructor, University of Denver

March-June 2015

African Religions (RLGS 3701-2)

Designed syllabus, lectured and led daily discussions, designed and graded all assignments for undergraduate and masters students. Course topics included American misconceptions about Africa; African conceptions of the Divine; Life Stage Rituals; Rites of Sacrifice; Spirit Possession Ceremonies and Spiritual Healing; Islam and Christianity in Africa; African Diaspora Religions; and the history of the black church in America.

Instructor, University of Virginia

July 2013

Introduction to African Religions (AAS 2559/RELA 275)

Designed syllabus, lectured and led daily discussions, designed and graded all assignments for a group of first through fourth year students in an introductory course on the history of religions in Africa. Course topics included African conceptions of the Divine; Rituals, Rites of Passage and Religious Specialists within Traditional African Religions; Islam and Christianity in Africa; and African Diaspora and African American Religions

Graduate Teaching Assistant, University of Virginia

August 2008 - May 2010

Attended lectures, led three weekly discussion sections, held office hours, graded all assignments including weekly quizzes, class presentations, essay exams, and final exam

Christianity in Africa with Dr. Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton

Fall 2008

Islam in Africa with Dr. Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton

Spring 2009

African Religions with Dr. Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton

Fall 2009

Afro-Creole Religions in the Americas with Dr. Jalane Schmidt

Spring 2010

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

August 2013 – May 2014

Co-Organizer, African Studies Colloquium, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Organized yearlong lecture series among faculty and graduate student Africanists at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

July 2012 – August 2012

Graduate Assistant for the Summer Transition Program, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

Assisted pre-matriculated first-year students in their transition from high school to college, worked with a group of six students in two summer school courses, led daily one-hour discussion meetings with students to assist them in applying academic skills to their content class materials, attended regular staff meetings

July 2006 – August 2007

Administrative and Editorial Assistant, The Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, Charlottesville, VA,

Answered telephones, met and greeted visitors, responded to and directed emails, organized and ordered lunches for conferences, performed general clerical duties, helped edit articles for the journal, *The Hedgehog Review*

August 2001 – May 2005

Office of Admission Student Intern, Trinity University, San Antonio, TX

Conducted interviews with potential students, aided in admission decision making process, provided tours and information on Trinity University to potential students, their families, and the community. Performed administrative duties and acted as support to the dean and the supportive staff.

August 2003 – May 2005

Outdoor Recreation Coordinator, Trinity University, San Antonio, TX

Developed and led student groups on outdoor excursions around the state. With team of staff, designated trip locations, coordinated travel, expenditures, gear, and meals for students. Provided leadership support to group while on excursions.

June – August 2003

Senior Counselor, Phillips Brooks House Association, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Developed program and curriculum for urban summer program with school aged children. Led children on educational field trips, taught and provided tutoring, coordinated volunteers and familial involvement.

LANGUAGES

Native fluency in **English**

Advanced proficiency in **French** and **Malagasy**

Intermediate proficiency in **Swahili**

Competence in **Arabic**

OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE

September 2011 – June 2012

Madagascar: Antsiranana, Ambilobe; nine months; dissertation field research

September 2010 – July 2011

China/Tibet: Beijing, Chengdu, Kanding, Dege; ten months; traveled with partner during his year of dissertation research

June 2008 – August 2008

Madagascar: Antsiranana, Ambilobe; 8 weeks; language study/preliminary dissertation research/feasibility study

August 2005 – Dec. 2005

Madagascar: Anjozorobe, Vatondry; 4.5 months; volunteer English teacher for The Dodwell Trust

December 2005 – May 2006

Uganda: Jinja, Bujagali; 4.5 months; volunteer research assistant for Soft Power Health/Soft Power Education

February 2004 – May 2005

Madagascar: Antananarivo, Antsiranana, Fianarantsoa; 4 months; study abroad through the School for International Training's program Madagascar: Culture and Society

