and gallery showings. An early preview of this work is available at www.seanjsprague.com.

Please send column ideas or items of interest to David Kanper at dkanper@mail.sdsu.edu.

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**Society for the Anthropology of Religion**

**Jennifer Selby, Contributing Editor**

This month SAR member Maarit Forde reflects upon the complexities of returning to Trinidad to teach cultural studies in a liberal arts department.

**Redefining Margins in a Trinidadian Classroom**

By Maarit Forde (U West Indies–St Augustine)

Ten years after my doctoral fieldwork in Trinidad and Tobago I returned to the Caribbean to work at the St Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies. Hired mainly because of my anthropology training and specialization in religions in the Caribbean, I would teach and supervise students in the postgraduate Cultural Studies program.

The Caribbean may not be prominent on the atlas of anthropologically interesting locales primarily because its societies have been judged too mobile, mixed and modern to match researchers’ imaginaries of ingenuity and authenticity. But the corpus of Caribbeanist anthropology, religion has always emerged as a major theme, perhaps because of its facile association with non-Western culture.

While social distance, discomfort, prejudice and even fear mark many negative responses, students’ reactions have also revolved concerns about the ethnonationalist agenda that promotes “African” religious traditions. For some intellectuals and cultural activists, Orisha and other religions associated with an African past offer a foundation for cultural identity not dominated by colonial, European or North American values and ideas. It is partly for this reason that a brief exploration of the Orisha religion has been included in the Cultural Studies curriculum.

Certainly foreign anthropologists’ fascination with such traditions has contributed to this agenda. But for many, this project seems highly exclusive (given that more than half of Trinidad’s population are of Indian origin), or appears otherwise ill-suited for a consumerist, technologically advanced and highly transnational society.

“Am I entitled to a Trinidadian passport if I don’t identify with those things?” provoked a PhD student, when a conversation on local notions of afterlife touched on the spirits of the dead. Far from ancestors or worse, jumbies, her research interests revolve around theatre and cultural policy.

Instead of aligning themselves with the favorite themes in existing Caribbeanist anthropology research, our students are working on important questions pertinent to contemporary Trinidad. While some are interested in the showcase triad of national culture—steelpan, carnival and calypso or soca music—there are many who have chosen to explore the margins rather than the mainstream. But these margins seem more inclusive than those usually covered in Caribbeanist anthropology. They include drag queens, LGBT members of Catholic and Hindu communities, Indo-Trinidadian protest songs and MTV-influenced youth groups at shopping malls.

The Trinidad that emerges from these studies may be purged from religious ideas and practices that since the colonial period have been a source of embarrassment to the middle classes. It is not, however, any more selective or mainstream than the society depicted in the existing canon of Caribbeanist anthropology.

Contributor Maarit Forde may be reached at Maarit.Forde@sta.uwi.edu. Please send column ideas or items of interest to Jennifer Selby at jselby@munn.ca.

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**Society of East Asian Anthropology**

**Anru Lee and Bridget Love, Contributing Editors**

**Anthropology of Food in China, Taiwan and Japan**

By Stephanie Assmann (Akita U) and Yi-Chieh Jessica Lin (National Chung Hsing U Taiwan)

Spanning environmental, political and popular culture domains, the anthropology of food in East Asia is a vibrant field of scholarship. Areas of current interest and future collaboration include foodways, globalization and national identity. Recent volumes in this field include Chinese Food and Foodways in Southeast Asia and Beyond, edited by Chee-Beng Tan (Chinese U Hong Kong). Place and identity are leading themes in Japanese Foodways, Past and Present, edited by Eric Rath (U Kansas) and Stephanie Assmann, while Katarzyna Cwirkiewska’s (Leiden U) upcoming book Colonial Recipes: Food, Modernity and Japanese Rule in Korea examines colonial histories of food. In researching food’s global dimensions, Rossella
S E C T I O N  N E W S

Gastronomical and historical interests also shape the volume Japanese Cuisine, Culture and Consumption. Merry White (Boston U) investigates the sociocultural history of the cafe. Eric Rath traces historical culinary writings and ceremonial banquets in his book Food and Fantasy in Early Modern Japan. Finally, Joyce Hsu-Yen Yeh (National Dong Hwa U) explores food and tourism performance among Taiwan’s Tarokamor minority.

In the realm of agriculture, Tianshu Pan (Fudan U) investigates organic farming in Shanghai; Lixia Dong (Fudan U) explores greenhouse vegetable production in Shandong; and Guoli Dong (Shanghai U) examines women food producers in Anhui. Efforts to revitalize peripheral areas through food cultivation attract research interest in Japan. Stephanie Assmann investigates governmental and citizen initiatives to preserve local agricultural products. Bridget Love (U Oklahoma) studies efforts of rural farmers in northern Japan to revive local economies through heritage foods.

Finally, pursuing a deeper history of subsistence in Asia, archaeologist Li Liu (Stanford U) uses advanced microscopes to explore transitions in food production in early Neolithic China through use-wear analysis.

Please send news items and comments to Anru Lee (alee@vs23.cornell.edu) and Bridget Love (loveb@ou.edu).

Society for Humanistic Anthropology

FRÉDÉRIC W. GLEACH and VILMA SANTIAGO-IBRAJRY, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

We are pleased to introduce our new undergraduate Executive Board member, Emma Kinna, an anthropology major at SUNY-Oswego currently studying abroad in Paris. Emma was unable to attend the New Orleans meeting, but we look forward to meeting her soon. We also want to wish everyone a productive and relaxing summer!

The Privilege of Comprehension

By Emma Kinna (SUNY–Oswego)

Language is a freedom that I seldom gave any thought to before I came to Europe. Everyone has moments of inarticulacy, but I knew if I extended my reach enough, I’d grab the words I needed. As a writer, I tend to find solace in language. For me, there is security in the written word, but I never realized the extent of this until I arrived in Paris.

I came with ideas of how I would strengthen my French. I’d shun the Americans in my study abroad program. I’d only order food in French. I’d only speak French with my roommate. Not quite.

The Americans in my program were the first available friends to make. All of my classes are for those learning French. Why would a French person need to take them? Ordering food in French is relatively easy, but what about the waiter’s response? Luckily, everyone seems to understand the clueless American stare that I’ve given so many times in lieu of a response. Once waiters see that face, they slow down, or worse, speak English with a smug smile.

My French roommate has indeed turned out to be one of the best, most helpful parts of my experience abroad. But I lack both discipline and vocabulary, and Imene could use some practice with her English, and so we speak “Franglais,” for example, “Imene, je suis désolé pour être un peu aimable.”

In desperation, I finally asked her to pretend she didn’t understand English.

One night, I went out to a party with a friend of Imene’s. She showed me the ropes, and I mingled all in French, even ordering cette boisson bleue when I couldn’t understand the name of a drink. I felt uninteresting because my narrow vocabulary gave me narrow subject matter. I felt ignorant because I couldn’t easily join into any conversations. I felt ridiculous, hearing the frustrated grammatical errors coming out of my mouth. I spoke like a small child. After only an hour or so I was exhausted.

When I left the party, a defeated smile on my face, I strode up the block to take a look at Notre Dame. To look at Notre Dame is a beautiful, humbling experience, and I realized then that learning a language is very much the same. While it narrows your means to communicate for a little while, it widens your perspective. It changes how you see culture, how you maneuver through it. After a while small triumphs, such as giving a stranger directions or having a short conversation, seem a little bit bigger, and when they begin to add up, you become aware of the privilege of comprehension. And once you finally hear yourself somehow creating the same beautiful sounds in a way that makes sense, you find you have an entire story, an entire journey to relay about the way you learned how. And when I need a little linguistic comfort food, when I feel like I’m banging my head against the language barrier, I read an English paperback and remind myself that all is not lost.

Weeks later, I went to another party. My expectations were low, but everyone was friendly and before I knew it, I was speaking French. Badly, yes, but as I spoke, no one was looking around trying to escape speaking with The American. And this time, I even said things like “Est-ce que tu voyages beaucoup?” and “Oui, jeadore Batman” and somehow managed to tell a girl that I’d changed majors and why. Petit a petit, as my French professor would say. Little by little, I was learning. And when the party was over, I not only had some new French friends, but knew The Da Vinci Code was home waiting for me.

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Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology

ANNELOU YEPH, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Longitudinal Work at the Margins of the State in Quito, Ecuador

By Kathleen Fine-Dare (Fort Lewis C)

Working in Quito, Ecuador, since 1980 (with a hiatus from 1989–2000) has been an extraordinarily rich experience. I have been privileged to work with some of the same...