WREL2001 World Religions in Context

Semester 1, 2014

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Fieldwork Report Assessment Task

Aims:

* To encounter, in person, the practices and physical spaces of a group/movement/site that is deemed relevant to WREL2001.
* To see and experience the contextual elements of so-called ‘World Religions’.
* To write about a fieldwork experience, including any naturally occurring data gathered, in a formal scholarly manner.

Outcomes:

* To have experienced an unstructured observational fieldwork task, including writing up notes and forming these into a report.
* To have experience applying fieldwork research experiences to theoretical constructs.
* To be familiar with some of the problems and complexities of fieldwork with human beings.
* To critically reflect on what ‘context’ concerns, and problems of applying context to theory.

The Site Visit:

To write the report you will need to undertake a site visit to a location agreed upon with the unit coordinator. Your report will be a discussion of your observations of the site, any practices or events you observe, and any naturally occurring data you are able to gather. These data are to be applied to a theory of your choosing, in discussion with the unit coordinator.

The report should be based on first-hand observation, but you can incorporate other literature, including any that you may find at the site (naturally occurring data). I recommend you do some preliminary research on the site/group/movement before your visit, as this will help you understand better what you see. It may be useful to speak to any leaders/organisers present, but you should not bother participants/attendees. You should also examine the website of the site/group, if there is one. Further, while most places welcome sincere students as visitors, you should call before your visit to check on any dress prohibitions or requirements, and to make sure that the place is open to visitors at the time you propose to attend. Use your (culturally contingent) common sense when at the site; you should be quiet or noisy where appropriate, respectful, and appropriately dressed. Multiple visits are encouraged if the site will have you.

The Fieldwork Report Assessment, in this format, is an opportunity to apply some theory encountered in the unit to real-world settings. While undertaking observation, you are reminded to take care not to interfere with the practices of the group/attendees as much as is possible (the very fact of your presence is interference). Be polite, be discrete, and seek permission where you think it applicable (for example photographing an object).

After your site visit find a place you can sit and write; a café, your car, a library, anywhere. There you should do what every good fieldworker does after a research visit and “write like hell!”, as the great Garry W. Trompf once said to me. Write about everything you did, everything you saw, smelled, touched. While it is fresh in your mind, leave no detail unwritten. Believe me, you will thank yourself later.

The Report:

In week 5 both the tutorial and the lecture will be dedicated to planning, executing, and writing-up your fieldwork report.

Your report can take a number of quite different forms, but your intent should be to communicate to the reader (me, and perhaps your colleagues) a sense of the group/movement/site and how we might want to read it for the purposes of a particular argument. To this end you need to pick an aspect of the group/movement/site to write about. This might be ethnicity, gender, aesthetics, leadership/hierarchy, ritual, demographics or any of a number of things. I would recommend choosing what you want to write about after your site visit(s). The point is to seek specificity in order to allow you to focus on context, rather than generalities.

The fieldwork essay is to be 1,000 words in length (not including bibliography, but including in-text references), formatted and styled according to the WREL2001 style guide, and is to be submitted by **4pm Thursday 17 April, 2014**.