
*Introduction to the Second Edition
Faith and Community in Italian
Harlem, 1880-1950*

When I climbed aboard Metro North in New Haven one day in the late 1970s, en route to New York to begin my research on Italian-American Catholicism in the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I understood myself to be a historian and I thought of my trip as being in search of archives where I hoped to find documents that would allow me to tell this story. I have heard historians proudly say that they study only dead people, and in those early days I, too, was looking for dead people. The archival moment—descent into moldy, poorly lit rooms heaped with filthy tattered documents, held tight in the clutches of vicious and venal caretakers in forbidding locations that the historian approaches at great personal risk—has been central to the production of the authority and status of history writing as a modern *profession*. The first practitioners of history as an academic discipline, anxious to distinguish themselves from the amateurs who preceded them, emphasized the arduousness of archival work and even its risks and dangers, grounding their authority in having met and overcome great obstacles on the way to truth. The new historians were men, the amateurs mostly women, and so also at stake in these origin myths was the gendering of the emergent historical profession as male. How much all this would affect me I did not yet know as I set out for New York. But somewhere in the back of my mind I am sure I was thinking or hoping that this trip to East Harlem was to be the foundation of my status as a real historian.¹

THE ANXIETIES OF A HISTORIAN IN THE FIELD

I found archives, and I had my share of archival moments. I encountered, as everyone studying New York Catholic history necessarily had to in those days, the much-feared gatekeeper of the city's archdiocesan archives, a nun who clearly understood it to be her job never to let anyone see the documents in her care. To this end she set impossible tasks for scholars. "I need the exact folder number of the document you wish to see," she told me the first time I contacted her, but there was no way of knowing this because there was no register or catalogue that I could ever discover. The forty days of Jesus' sojourn in the desert became the interval of our conversations. "It's Advent," she said; "call me after Christmas." "It's Lent—get back to me after Easter." Sacred seasons followed one another like the leaves of a calendar in an old movie. But in a much more welcoming archive, the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies in Philadelphia, I found the papers of Leonard Covello, a beloved East Harlem educator and public figure. It was in his papers that I found the *fiesta* of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and it was the discovery of the *fiesta* that got me to the streets of East Harlem.

It quickly became clear to me that although it was not the thriving community it once had been, *cara Harlem*, as the Italians had called it—beloved Harlem—continued to exist in a number of ways: in the remnant of old-timers in its northernmost sections; in the memories of the men and women who had left East Harlem only two decades or so before; and, most important, during the annual *fiesta*, when in an uncanny way memory took shape in the streets. On the Madonna's feast days, the neighborhood was (and still is) crowded with Italians again. Old neighbors meet in the streets as if they still lived in the surrounding tenements, and familiar faces fuss around the Madonna's procession float. These were not dead people. The border, indeed the firebreak, I had figured on between then and now, us and them, the past and the present, turned out to be porous. The precise configuration of the relation between the present and the past is not inherent in the nature of history but is constituted by historians and others engaged in the work of remembering (and forgetting) as they tell stories and write histories out of the needs, desires, and fears of their present circumstances. Even the pastness of the past—the quality of its being over, once and for all, that we tend to assume—is

achieved, not given. The claim "oh, that's ancient history" is almost always a wish, an anxious attempt to put a boundary of time around some event that really is not over at all; it is a bid to silence the past. What I found in East Harlem made it impossible for me to establish the pastness of that particular past in any simple sense.²

So I began to do a kind of layered fieldwork in the fissure between the present and the past. Over a two-year period I traveled around New York City's outer boroughs and New Jersey, talking with people who had once lived in East Harlem; I spent many months in the old neighborhoods in northern Manhattan, meeting older and more recent residents and community leaders. This enterprise soon became a cause of real disorientation and anxiety. Was I still doing history? How would I cite my sources? What should I do with the specifics of my fieldwork? Women cooked for me when I stopped by their homes to talk with them and their families about Italian Harlem, for example, so that much of my research was conducted over long days of eating and drinking. I came to realize that I was learning as much from *how* people were talking to me as from what they were telling me, as much from what was going on around the stories as from the stories themselves. Was there a place for this information in my narrative? Were such interactions even appropriate for a historian? Did I have to validate everything I was told with a printed source? Was it necessary to archive my tapes so others could scrutinize them?

These questions seem naïve today, but they are revealing, too. I recognize all that anxiety about textuality, for example, about the absence of texts, as the fear of losing my own compass and authority as the interpreter of texts in a discipline (religious studies) wedded to textuality. The American Academy of Religion, the leading professional organization of scholars of religion in the United States, grew out of the National Association of Biblical Instructors, a pedigree that is emblematic of the enduring authority of the written word in the contemporary culture of religious scholarship and one of the grounds of the persistent uneasiness with ethnography in the discipline. My concerns about approaching the past through animated conversations in crowded, noisy kitchens, while everyday life went on around me—my tapes record grandchildren coming and going, neighbors dropping by, grocery deliveries, ambulance and police sirens, and the crash of pots and pans—were the enactment in my own experience, moreover, of gender anxieties attending and constitutive of history's

emergence as a critical discipline in the modern era. Those descriptions by the earliest generations of professional historians of their struggles to overcome the conditions of archival work, to master and transcend the vicissitudes of the body, articulated an "antinomy of body . . . to spirit," according to the historian Bonnie G. Smith. Associated with the corporal end of this dichotomy—with body—were women and the various concerns of everyday life, while spirit represented the public, the political, and the masculine. This foundational body/spirit split determined what historians chose to study (war, politics, civic events, not the details of everyday domestic life), where they chose to study (in silent archives, alone, free of the multitude of the world's—especially women's—voices), and how historians carried and represented themselves, the discipline's emergent (and enduring) ethos. The intellectual and social authority of modern historiography was premised, indeed, on this antinomy. But here I was in women's kitchens, my body well-cared for, nourished by good food and surrounded by good company. I found myself, in other words, right in the vise of the antinomy that structured not only modern historiography but modern professionalism generally.³

Back in New Haven, meanwhile, I was asked one day what I anticipated the end date of my history would be. This was a problem, I confessed, because the festa still took place. Maybe I would go into the mid-1960s. The person I was talking to laughed. Right up to your own birth in the Bronx, she joked. The comment filled me with a hot professional shame. Not only was I not using traditional archives, but I had transgressed onto the time of my own being.

The issues raised by my experience in East Harlem have to do with the nature of historical knowledge, with the relationships between ethnography and historiography, between present and past, and between everyday life and academic knowledge and protocols; with the relative usefulness of text and practice as historical sources, with the appropriate positioning of the scholar of religion to his or her subject, and with the gendering of knowledge. And the insistence with which such issues pressed themselves upon me marks a moment in the history of the study of religious history. I had apparently stepped outside the borders of historiography—ironically, in search of history—and I was at a loss as to how to proceed. I was not completely conscious at the time that these were the stakes, but I knew this in my bones. The reality of such boundaries—which present themselves as

matters of academic or professional limits or standards, but clearly involve much bigger existential and ethical dilemmas—is pressed not only into our professional consciousness but into our bodies, too. This is what it means to be trained in or acculturated to a particular intellectual discipline, to be disciplined by the expectations, orientations, limits, and fears of a field of inquiry, and to bear within oneself the history of the field's becoming. Transgression, even imagined transgression, registers as shame in the body and as intellectual uncertainty.

The intensity of feeling evoked in me and others by these questions—*anxiety, disorientation, panic, humiliation*—indicates that the borders between past and present, between history and ethnography, between scholar and subject were (and remain) closely guarded and defended, and that they are threatened by scholarship that looks outside archives and texts and proceeds *intersubjectively* in the spaces of everyday experience. I believe these to be issues of wide import in the contemporary practice of religious history and in the study of religion. There is broad interest among younger scholars of religion today in ethnographic approaches, at a time when the key terms in the discipline—including *religion, culture, and history*—are under intense critical scrutiny. We have gone well beyond the debates between intellectual and social history at this juncture to a rethinking of the very nature and practice of religious history and of the identity of the religious historian.

THE DEAD END AND HIGH STAKES OF "POPULAR RELIGION"

I was tentatively making my way intellectually and emotionally in East Harlem, against these invisible obstacles and internalized authorities, to the study of what scholars have begun to call "lived religion": religious practice and imagination in ongoing, dynamic relation with the realities and structures of everyday life in particular times and places. This was the real battle, I can see now, not my efforts to get into a particular archive by outwitting a wily archivist. The study of lived religion explores how religion is shaped by and shapes the ways family life is organized, for instance: how the dead are buried, children disciplined, the past and future imagined, moral boundaries established and challenged, homes constructed, maintained, and destroyed, the gods and spirits worshiped and impor-

tuned, and so on. Religion is approached in its place within a more broadly conceived and described lifeworld, the domain of everyday existence, practical activity, and shared understandings, with all its crises, surprises, satisfactions, frustrations, joys, desires, hopes, fears, and limitations.⁴

This level of religious experience was all but invisible in the discipline at the time and absent from its critical lexicon. The only term available for it, *popular religion*, was unclear, misleading, and tendentious. Definitional debates over the meanings and implications of popular religion were endless and deeply frustrating. Did "popular religion" refer exclusively to the religious practices and imaginings of common folk? But then what becomes of "popular" religion when social or religious elites participate in it (as they almost always do)? Was popular religion distinct from "official" religion? Where did popular religion come from? Did popular religion represent a corruption or misappropriation of authorized teaching and ritual? Was popular religion even historically significant, or were such forms historically inconsequential curiosities, irrelevant to the main developments in religious history in any given period? Is the history of the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel absolutely essential to the story of the New York Catholic Archdiocese or of American Catholicism? Do students need to know about this to know about American Catholicism?

Rather than making it possible to study religious practice and imagination in relation to other expressions and forms of human activity—to legal or architectural idioms, for example, or cosmological speculations—the designation *popular religion* served to seal off certain expressions of religious life from an unspecified but obviously normative "religion" (without the qualifier *popular*). How were we to think about the social and cultural place of devotionism (people's direct engagement with sacred figures amid the quotidian circumstances of life)? Where did domestic religious expressions (home shrines, for example, or the religious grounds or implications of intergenerational bonds or tensions) fit? What of highly emotionally charged religious idioms, and ritual practices that took place outside churches and temples (or at the intersection of inside and outside)? The term instituted unnecessary and confusing boundaries.⁵

These are issues of power—the power of our theories of "religion" to constitute some ideas and practices as religious and others not, some practices and perspectives as essential to a particular religious

and cultural world and others marginal. Visitors from outside the community to the festa of Our Lady of Mount Carmel over the years have not always recognized what they saw (and see) there—people walking barefoot behind the Madonna, kissing the statues in church and penciling petitions for love or health on them, eating and gambling under the bright colored lights strung over the streets—as religious, and neither have many scholars of religion. Religious idioms like those associated with the Madonna's cult (the technical term for Catholic devotional practices) have been designated "magical," "superstitious," overly materialistic, and manipulative; they are deemed theologically incoherent, ambiguous amalgams of the sacred and the profane. There is also the question of what to do with the many different practices that surround a religious event—neighborly socializing, for example, or the family conflicts that may erupt on such occasions, or customs related to making and eating food. Are they to be included within the rubric *religious* in approaching such historical and cultural expressions? These are high-stakes matters that go well beyond issues of scholarly definition, or—put another way—scholarly definitions of religion are implicated in much broader social and cultural agendas. They inevitably entail what we are willing to tolerate as religion and what we find intolerable, what boundaries we insist on—between persons, for example, or between the living and the dead, or the past and the present—and what boundary transgressions frighten us, which behaviors are socially acceptable and which offend us, what postures we sanction and which we condemn, and so on.

The effort to contain and control religion by definition—by establishing some practices or experiences as authentically religious and others as perversions—has generated hierarchies in American popular and academic discourse. Sometimes a distinction is made between religion (which means the historically and culturally specific forms, rituals, moral prohibitions and permissions, and theological teachings of particular religious cultures, the things that separate one religious group from another) and spirituality (which refers to an ahistorical, interior apprehension of religious truth that is independent of culture), or between religion and faith (likewise defined as a matter of interiority, with an emphasis on the autonomy and individuality of believers). Spirituality and faith (in these pairings) are seen as superior to religion, more authentic because unbound by history

and cultural contingency, above matter and free of particularity, essential rather than circumstantial, universal and transtemporal, not rooted in specific times and places. The term *popular religion* served to authorize religion, spirituality, and faith—defined and valued as I have just described—by standing as their necessary other. Sometimes a distinction is made between religion and “magic” or “superstition,” in which case the latter two terms bear the onus of identification with the particular and contingent, with matter, emotion, and body, and with the ambiguous confusion of the sacred and profane.⁶ Another way of containing what went on, and still goes on, in East Harlem is to call it premodern and to emphasize its disconnectedness from modern forms of religious experience and expression; from such a perspective, the festa represents the religiously atavistic. Popular religion, within the frame of these normative hierarchies, is the experience of dark, poor, alien folk, of children and women, of the colonized, enslaved, and “primitive,” of the ignorant or uneducated. Modern societies enforce distinctions between good and bad, tolerable and intolerable religion in many different ways—by zoning regulations that prohibit certain forms of religious expression in particular places, for instance, by disregard for sacred places and objects not commonly recognized as such, and by ostracism and contempt—and these more overt prohibitions and constraints attain the sanction and authority of universal reason when they are restated in terms of religious theory. Thus the designations *magic*, *superstitious*, and *popular*, among others, are also ways of policing religion.

Such hierarchies are thoroughly cultural constructions, deeply implicated in the realities of power. Because distinctions among kinds of religious practice and imagination are so fundamental to contemporary culture, they appear normal and natural. They come to us as ever-present and without history—of course writing a petition on a saint's statue is an example of “magical” thinking; what else could it be? Of course it belongs under “popular religion” and not simply under “religion.” But the basic nomenclature of religious studies is deeply and directly implicated in the history of Western racism and colonialism and in three centuries of divisive, bitter internecine Christian conflict. The words we use to categorize and rank religious phenomena are marked by this tumultuous history.

Two periods in particular emerge as crucial in the history of the Western conceptualization of religion: the religious conflicts of the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Catholics and Protestants fought bitterly over territory, political authority, and the meaning and practice of Christianity, and the period of industrialization and of the colonization of Asia and Africa by Western powers in the nineteenth century. How we understand or construct the religious—which categories of persons and practices are seen as religious and which as superstitious or worse—reflects and encodes the politics, imperial ideologies, and religious conflicts of these periods. Theoretical accounts of religion in the modern era created, authorized, and sanctified social and racial hierarchies in Europe and the United States, and in the territories they dominated. Scholars of religion and apologists for empire both drew together—the one in theories, the other in practices of domination—African peoples and Irish Catholic immigrants in East London, for example, or Hindu practitioners and working-class children, in discourses of otherness that served the work of colonization and domination at home and abroad as it contributed to the construction of European authority as white, male, adult, Christian, “universal,” “rational.” The religious practices of exploited populations were reinterpreted as further indications of the necessity and inevitability of their domination, so that the languages of power and those of the critical study of religion converged. From South Africa to East Harlem, southern Italy to Mississippi, certain kinds of religious practice were theoretically construed in such a way as to deny the humanness of practitioners and to justify their oppression or marginalization.⁷

Setting the study of religion in its place in relation to political and social history, and understanding that the lenses with which we approach phenomena such as the festa of Our Lady of Mount Carmel are implicated in long and complex histories—understanding, in other words, that these lenses are not innocent or simple—allow us to unearth, for example, the deeply embedded anti-Catholicism in European and American religious studies. The designation *popular religion* in relation to American religion was, among other things, a code for Catholic-like ritual and devotional practices, deemed inappropriate and even incomprehensible on the religious landscape of the United States. Religious practices such as those associated with the feast of the Madonna of 115th Street were treated at best as a passing phase in the religious acculturation of premodern immigrants and migrants. “Popular religion” thus served to underscore what was

un-American about such religious phenomena, and, as it did so, it contributed to the construction of a normative American religiosity that was the opposite of whatever happened on 115th Street. The term *popular religion* identified and cordoned off forms of religious expression that subverted or transgressed boundaries fundamental to the construction of modern religiosity and of modern society—for example, religious forms that blur distinctions between matter and spirit (as in the assumption by some of the faithful that the Madonna was really *there* in East Harlem, present in material representations of her), between the sacred and the profane (as in the gambling that took place within the Madonna's sight), between public spaces defined as free of religious presence and private religious experience.

My point here is not to defend or endorse such religious expressions. I do not share these practices or orientations (or I do not share all of them). I am deeply sympathetic to efforts to define and maintain a public space where citizens can meet and make necessary decisions for a common life without confronting or undermining each other with ontological or theological claims. Religious expressions like those called popular have been responsible for much personal, domestic, and social grief and turmoil. Religious practice and imagination may destabilize boundaries—of the self, for example, or in the social world—that are better left intact, as the Bosnian nightmare and the horror of September 11, among other instances, reminded us.⁸ Rather, I am saying that we need to be aware of the history of the ways of seeing religion that we bring to religious phenomena such as the festa, that theories of religion are grounded in broader social agendas, and that they encode and enact fears of and desires for various forms of religious expression. This will better enable us to approach religion as it is in any particular social world, rather than religion as we want it to be or religion within the limits of our tolerance.

Sanitized, carefully bounded and contained notions of spirituality, religion, or faith are completely subverted by such phenomena as the festa on 115th Street. The festa was, and is, not about the cherished values of modernity or of normative, tolerable religion—not about individuality but about selves situated in social worlds, not about transcendence but about religion's place in everyday life, not about autonomy but about the ways that people come to be within the forms of their culture, not about empowerment but about living within the coordinates of the possible.

The major theoretical traditions of religious studies in the 1970s remained ahistorical, impatient with the contingent details of the quotidian, oriented primarily toward theology, and more interested in transcendence than in historical immanence. Mere historicity was treated with contempt. But historians, folklorists, and anthropologists, who were more comfortable on earth, began to clear the way past the simple and defeating dualities of the popular-religion debate in the 1970s and 1980s, creating an extraordinary body of compassionate, critical, closely observed, and richly textured ethnographic histories of religious practice and imagination in particular times and places, including Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms; Person and God in a Spanish Valley*, by William A. Christian, Jr.; Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie's *Montaillou*; the powerful chapter on religion in Eugene D. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*; and Pierre-Jakez Helias's *The Horse of Pride*. Historians of the Reformation turned their attention to the ways that the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century registered in the everyday experience of local parishioners in towns and villages throughout Europe. This extraordinary efflorescence in the study of religious practice and imagination made a new, more capacious problematic of popular or vernacular religion possible.⁹

THE STUDY OF LIVED RELIGION

The study of lived religion situates all religious creativity within culture and approaches all religion as lived experience, theology no less than lighting a candle for a troubled loved one; spirituality as well as other; less culturally sanctioned forms of religious expression (such as licking the stones of a church floor). Rethinking religion as a form of cultural work, the study of lived religion directs attention to institutions and persons, texts and rituals, practice and theology, things and ideas—all as media of making and unmaking worlds. This way of approaching religious practice as fundamentally and always *in* history and culture is concerned with what people *do* with religious idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them, and how in turn people are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making as they make these worlds. Religious practices and understandings have meaning only in relation to other cultural forms and in relation to the life experiences and actual cir-

cumstances of the people using them; what people mean and intend by particular religious idioms can be understood only situationally, on a broad social and biographical field, not within the terms of a religious tradition or religious language understood as existing apart from history.¹⁰ Religion approached this way is set amid the ordinary concerns of life as these are structured at various moments in history and in different cultures, at the junctures of self and culture, family and social world, and on those occasions when the religious imagination (which itself is constituted both by culture and by personal experience and inheritance) takes hold of the world (as the world is said to be) in prayer, ritual, and theology, as it is taken hold of by the world.¹¹

Culture is understood here to comprise the webs of meaning that humans spin and in which they are suspended, the ways that humans create and represent themselves and others. But culture is not a hermetic field of singular meanings. It is messy, contested, unstable, always in motion. The meanings of a single sign or practice may be multiple and inconsistent, and may change, moreover, as a particular sign is used to work on the world and the self. A particular practice—praying to the Madonna, for example—the meanings of which seem to be clear enough and discernible through Catholic theology, in fact may be caught in the tension between conscious and unconscious motivations and desire, or between now and then, here and there (in this case, between Italy and New York), hopes and memories. Because culture is always historically situated, human signs and practices bear within them the marks and tears of their histories; such signs are fundamentally historical creations.¹² Praying to the Madonna meant one thing to the older generation of immigrants, another when immigrants and their American born or raised children prayed together. Religion is always religion-in-action, religion-in-relationships between people, between the way the world is and the way people imagine or want it to be. The interpretive challenge of the study of lived religion is to develop the practice of disciplined attention to people's signs and practices as they describe, understand, and use them, in the circumstances of their experiences, and to the structures and conditions within which these signs and practices emerge.

People do not simply act, of course; they attempt to understand and narrate themselves as actors. So the study of lived religion includes the work of social agents/actors themselves as narrators and interpreters (and reinterpreters) of their own experiences and histo-

ries, recognizing that the stories we tell about others exist alongside the many and varied stories they tell of themselves. The study of lived religion is not about practice rather than ideas, but about ideas, gestures, imaginings, all as media of engagement with the world. It is pointless to study particular beliefs or practices—the Catholic teaching on the Virgin Mary, for example, or the Pentecostal theology of sanctification—apart from the people who use these ideas in the definite circumstances of their lives. Religion-in-action cannot be separated from other practices of everyday life, from the ways that humans do other necessary and important things or from other cultural structures and discourses (legal, political, medical, and so on). Nor can sacred spaces be understood in isolation from the places where these things are done (workplaces, hospitals, law courts, homes, and streets), from the media used to do them, or from the relationships constructed around them. The emphasis in the study of lived religion is on *embodied* practice and imagination, as men, women, and children exist in and move through their built and found environments. The material world is not inert background to cultural practice; it is its essential medium.

Because religion is so completely enmeshed in the structures of culture, issues of power become crucial. Indeed, power is fundamental to the very meaning of practice, generally, and of religious practice in particular.¹³ By *power* I mean not only the power of some over others (although I do certainly mean to include this) but also the power that circulates through, as it sustains and vivifies, cultural forms, for example, aesthetics, ethics, kinesthesia, and architecture. These are the taken for granted aspects of a culture, the meanings of a particular world that are given the sanction of the natural, the inherently good, the commonsensical, or of the sacred. Ethnic ties, which are always contingent and fictive, are sanctioned by allusions to blood and mother's milk, for example; or stories are told about a people's sacred provenance. It is this power that makes us know in our bodies that certain ways of being are the only appropriate ones for the world, as we are taught the world is. The efficacy and effects of this form of power are manifest in the shame and terror we feel when we transgress the boundaries it establishes. This includes the intellectual world as well: a clear instance of this was the shame provoked in me when I felt I had failed to maintain the normative distinction between the present

and the past as I found myself studying a history that was not over.

How is religion related to power? Religion is one of the cultural practices that constitute persons as particular kinds of beings in specific social worlds, and establishes, polices, and authorizes the boundaries of good and evil. As a person lives through religious idioms, as she prays in a distinct language, enacting certain ideas, arranging her body in the ways available in and mandated by her tradition—the women bent low, for example, to the stones of the church on 115th Street, bringing their bodies and petitions to the Madonna on the altar—she is also being enacted and created as a subject, with specific hopes and fears about herself and about the world. She is endowed, through these practices, with understandings of what is possible in life and what is not. What were women making of themselves at the annual festa? The celebrations on 115th Street and women's daily devotions to the Madonna del Carmine were not innocent. Religion is one of the more effective media by which social power is realized in bodies, just as religion shapes, orients, and limits the imagination, and it is pointless to study religion without reference to power (to both kinds of power)—pointless and irresponsible.

Understood this way, religion arises at the intersection of inner experience and the outer world. It does not belong completely to the self, because we inherit ways of thinking, feeling, and being, and because our culture's forms and expectations are pressed into our bodies and imaginations, establishing the grounds of comprehensibility and communication and the possibilities of creativity. A woman praying to the Madonna of Mount Carmel in the idioms of mid-twentieth century Italian-American Catholicism, for example—one of her inherited structures—was employing a decidedly poisoned medium in her quest for hope and consolation. Devotionalism taught that women were born to suffer, to suffer silently, to suffer on behalf of their kin, and that it was wrong to avoid suffering. Devotionalism, which women entered in times of dire need, often, and thus of great vulnerability, constructed women's interiorities, oriented their desires and hopes, and assigned them to the very suffering from which they were praying for relief.

But religion does not belong completely to culture, either. Devotionalism (as a Catholic idiom) has no life apart from people's experience of it. It is not possible, in other words, to tell the political history of Marian devotionalism, as some have tried to do, apart from

the lives of particular women engaging the Madonna. Women took hold of the world in imagination when they prayed to the Madonna and other holy figures out of intense need, desire, hope, or fear, conscious and unconscious. In the company of the Madonna, within sight of her benevolent and encouraging gaze, women accomplished things for themselves that they might not otherwise have been able to do; at least they could reorient themselves to their worlds, directing themselves toward new, previously unimagined (or even unimaginable) horizons. Cultural structures, in this case devotionalism, *become* history precisely at such moments of engagement. This is the radical historicity of the study of lived religion. Many things may happen in this engagement: latent tensions in the structure might widen, contradictions emerge, hidden or unrealized possibilities surface, implicit and unintended interpretations become accessible, all presenting women with the possibility of using the structure against itself, even as they are shaped by particular dimensions of it. Religion, to borrow the British psychologist D. W. Winnicott's terminology for the situation of the imagination, exists "inside, outside, and at the border." As people pray to, worship, and plead with the gods, the culture acts on the imagination and the imagination works on culture, to the possible transformation of both. This is how I understand religious creativity.¹⁴

Some moments in social, domestic, cultural, and personal history are particularly open to the transformation of subjects and structures both—the hot spots of death, sexuality, pain, deep transformations in material reality, environmental disasters, occasions of contradiction or disruption. The designation *uncle*, to borrow Peter Berger's example, is not given in nature, nor are the responsibilities or the appropriate affect of this role; although uncles and their nephews and nieces approach these roles as given, they are made and sustained in the ongoing work of culture.¹⁵ But in the circumstances I have just described, the taken-for-granted quality of "reality" is dissolved, and humans encounter the fictive nature of what they call real, in the sense that they apprehend the radical contingency of their worlds. This provokes in turn new uses of religious story, ritual, and metaphor, and new configurations of the real. Culture and self, inner and outer worlds are all in play at the same time. The challenge is to study religion dialectically, on the levels both of the self and of culture, tracking back and forth between structure and agency, tradition and act, imagination and reality,

and, in the process, dissolving the solidity of such dichotomies.

I consider such a perspective one of realism, by which I mean understanding human imagination, creativity, and capacity as being situated at the intersection of necessity and choice, structure and agency, of the given and the hoped-for, and recognizing, moreover, that choice never exists apart from constraint, possibility without discipline, or desire without limits. We are shaped by our circumstances, but we shape them too; we are always both subjects and objects, acting and acted upon. Enraptured by notions of transcendence and by the fantasy of a spirituality that floats free of the contingencies of culture and the vicissitudes of the body, the study of religion and religious history (and especially such study in comfortable economic times) has often lost sight of this chastened view of human spiritual and historical capacities. But the study of lived religion might help us abandon simple notions that religion empowers people or makes them autonomous, that religion either sustains the world or transcends it. Because it acknowledges the tremendous challenge entailed in using any religious idiom to work on the world in times of distress, the study of lived religion vividly opens out the tremendous creativity of religious practice and imaginings as it uncovers the limits of them.

RESEARCH AS A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE

I had been in the neighborhood for many weeks when Mount Carmel's pastor offered me one of the enormous cigars he smoked every day in his study after lunch. This kind interlude meant a great deal to me, and recalling it now brings back deep feelings of gratitude and relief. But at the time I did not quite know what to make of the pleasure I took in the gift. I did not yet understand what I was doing as fieldwork. My "research" was in the boxes of stored documents at the church, not in the quiet sharing of redolent cigars. I was a historian; the cigar was in the present; we were not in an archive. My exchanges with people in East Harlem were already pushing me past this static view of what I was doing, though—static and ungracious, because people were in fact inviting me into serious conversations about things that mattered to them (at my request)—and since these days in East Harlem I have become much clearer about this.

"Research is a living relation" between people, Jean-Paul Sartre says in *Search for a Method*, adding that "the relationship between

them must be itself interpreted as a moment of history."¹⁶ It took me a long time to understand that my research in East Harlem was taking place in and through the relationships I was forming there (in addition to the archival materials), that this is how I was learning about both the present and the past and about the relation between them. I imagined at first that I was doing a kind of oral history in the neighborhood, collecting information that was stored away in people's heads by asking good questions, the way one extracts information from a document. But this is not what was happening. I slowly realized, when I heard people say things like, "God, I haven't thought about this in years!" or "I probably shouldn't tell you this, but . . ." or when they looked away, unexpectedly moved or distressed or angered by a memory, by some piece of their lives that they had not thought about in a while, or perhaps never in this way. Fieldwork proceeds through relationships. This means that something that was not there before—understanding, memories, disappointments, and so on, hidden, unacknowledged, unformulated, or even unknown—becomes present in the exchanges as people tell their stories to another person who listens to them and responds. My sources reflected on their past, reinterpreted and reevaluated their experiences, discovered things about themselves and their histories that they had not previously realized or understood. A number of times, the interplay between present and past was acted out, when suddenly provoked by our conversation, people I was talking with who had grown up in Italian Harlem but had moved away suddenly decided to take me back to the old neighborhood for a tour. We piled into the car and made our way across one or another bridge that once upon a time had marked for these people the distance they had traveled from their childhood to their adult worlds—the George Washington Bridge, the Triborough, the Throgs Neck, or the Verrazano Narrows—headed back, in other words, toward the past, which existed only in the present. Italian Harlem, past and present, existed in between the present and the past in the relationships between me and the people with whom I was talking as we stood on their old blocks. Issues of trust became crucial. People tested me in various ways, making sure I could hold the stories they discovered they wanted to tell me.

My path to the realization that this kind of research is done not only among real people, struggling to make sense of themselves and of their worlds, but by real people too, also struggling to make sense

of things, was slow. I held tightly to a poorly understood but deeply cherished notion of needing to be an objective, distant observer who brought a trained but socially unconnected rationality to the work. What did my experience, my childhood, or my hopes and fears have to do with anything? My first posture in the neighborhood was to insist on my difference: I did not have a devotion to the Madonna, these were not my people. (What on earth was I thinking? I am an Italian American, from the Bronx, and all my relatives pray to the Virgin Mary.) I would listen and record and then, later, back in New Haven, listen again and interpret, alone in my room. I was interested in the past, moreover, construed as unattached to the present, so it was only stories *about* the past that initially caught my attention.

But culture consists in the ongoing efforts of men and women to make sense of, to live more or less well within, and to represent and communicate their worlds, work that goes on in endless rounds of conversation, reflection, discussion, imagination, practice, gesture, and ritual. Culture itself is fundamentally and inescapably intersubjective. Language, perception, emotion, and imagination all take shape in and through relationships (including relationships with ancestors, gods, spirits, ghosts, and other such figures). Relationships are fraught with desire, fear, denial, and needs of all sorts, conscious and unconscious, which makes for ambiguity, confusion, and misinterpretation; they exist on crowded social and political fields and are implicated in domination, oppression, and exclusion. But the fact is that humans exist intersubjectively, that reality itself is intersubjective, and that fieldwork is intersubjective discovery.¹⁷

Ethnographers and the people they live and study among are alike involved in these processes of interpreting, arguing, communicating, and understanding. Scholars of culture step into these rounds, attend to them, and contribute to them as they in turn struggle to understand other people and cultures, to understand themselves in relation to other people, and to communicate what they know and feel. This realization drew me across the distance I had established between myself and the people I was talking to and began the process of liberating me at last to be present in East Harlem. My interlocutors did not let me be invisible, moreover, drawing me out with questions about my life and experience. It is not necessary to become the other in order to see, for a moment, the world through his or her eyes. The derogatory, and racist, accusation of "going native" is, like the term *popular religion*,

boundary-setting rhetoric that seeks to preserve the utter alienness of the other. It is enough—and hard enough—simply to enter into real relationships with the other, in his or her environment, to engage their accounts of themselves and their worlds openly and attentively, with the willingness to disclose one's own world and imagination to them. I finally understood that this is what I was trying to do in East Harlem.

But what does ethnography have to do with historiography? What has a discipline based on sustained encounters with living people, usually in the circumstances of their everyday lives (not the ethnographer's) to do with a discipline grounded in the study of dead people whose remains have been moved to archives, often far from the places where they had once lived? On one level, it is useful to remember that the inert documents stored away in archives were once the living media of real people's engagement with the unfolding events of their times. The challenge for historians, as for ethnographers, is to figure out the relation between these archived pieces of a once-living world and the world from which they came, which they helped make, and to which they responded. My method in telling the story of the Madonna and Italian Harlem was to bring the voices from the archives and the voices from the streets into relation, allowing them to challenge, amend, deepen, and correct each other, to let the present inform the past and the past the present, and I could not have told this story without both kinds of sources. My listening-place was the juncture of past and present.

On another level, the oft-cited deadness of historical subjects and of the past itself has always seemed to me a form of license, not a natural given. "Dead" in this context means not simply that these subjects are no longer alive but that they cannot resist what is to be made of them. Deadness, and the accompanying silence, makes it possible, among other things, to locate figures of the past in *our* stories, to subsume their narrative into ours. Reference to the deadness of the past is a way of staking a claim on it. But historians must be open, as ethnographers try to be, to the shock of the unpredictability and difference of the past, which means open to the possibility of the past living in its insistence on telling its own story and so confounding us. Only in this way can the past teach us something new about ourselves, about the limits of our imaginings and ways of knowing, and even of our particular and distinctive ways of being human.

Although we have to begin with difference—and to this end it was a good thing that I was so preoccupied with distance and difference early in my East Harlem research, because this kept me from too easily analogizing from my Italian-American experience to theirs—we cannot end with difference. We cannot stop with otherness because then we turn the people we have gone among in the archives and in the field into curiosities. Historians need to be mindful of a common humanity with figures in the past—again, a bond that is denied by assertions of deadness. Figures in the past might be dead, but they lived once, and when they did, the fundamental impulses of their lives were probably not that much different from ours. Morally, we owe them and their heirs, whoever these heirs are, at least this recognition. If they remain other, or if we remain (or keep ourselves) other to them (out of some misplaced sense of academic propriety or epistemological caution), or if we even insist on their otherness, then we will tell bizarre and titillating stories about them, rendering their lives absurd and exotic. The political implications of this is that we open them up for possession and consumption by those to whom we represent them: if the people we study and write about are not recognizably human, they become available for appropriation by others, as inert objects of desire. The main existential point of all this, though, will be to establish the secure boundaries of our own worlds. The great payoff of otherness is the security of the givenness of our own experience.

So the other challenge of the journey to the past or to another culture is to recognize what people in these other times and places share with us, the ways our stories overlap, and the way in which a shared humanity creates the possibility for deeper understanding. This notion of shared humanity is not an assumption of mine. It has been both a discovery of fieldwork and archival research and a condition of them. The recognition of shared experience comes in exchanges in the field, when people ask me about my life or about my fears and needs, and I respond. On one level, this is simple human curiosity and indicates the sense that most humans appear to hold that they will find shared ground with others or with another. This is the hopefulness to asking someone else about their experience. But on another level this represents the refusal of otherness by the people we study; it is *their* determination not to be rendered alien. In the archives such moments are more subtle. They entail the surrender by the historian of the arro-

gance of the living. It requires understanding that people in the past have a story to tell about themselves that may not be congruent with the story we wish to tell about them and which is, at the same time, both like and unlike the stories we tell about ourselves. It means granting them the same authority for their voices that we demand in our own.

TIME AND THE OTHER IN EAST HARLEM

I have returned to the festa almost every year since this book was published (I think I have missed two), and I am now recognized at the event. People seek me out to add to stories they have already told me. (At a festa about ten years ago some friends brought me over to a very old woman from the neighborhood who—my friends exclaimed—had tremendous stories to tell me about the history of the festa. I sat down next to the woman in church. “Who are you?” she asked me. I told her and she said, “Oh, you’re the one who wrote that book.” The stories she was telling my friends, it turned out, came from this volume.) I have been invited to participate in various aspects of the festa over the years—I read one of the Scripture passages during Mount Carmel’s centennial Mass, for instance—and like returning Harlemites, which I am not, I visit with old acquaintances during the days before and after the celebration. I have made very good friends in the community, but everyone understands that my interests in and connections to Harlem are different from theirs. I “study” Harlem, and my acquaintances there know that when I talk with them I am, among other things, trying to better understand the life of the place. I am also catching up on what has been going on with them. Some are enthusiastic about this, others do not much care.

Every year at the festa—*every year*—a woman named Antoinette seeks me out. Antoinette is very tall, and she uses her height well on these occasions to tower over me. “So,” she says, squinting down at me, “here you are!” Her enormous purse bumps between us. I stretch up so we can kiss each other hello. Then Antoinette sweeps her arm across the scene outside the church—every year she does this—taking in the crowds of people, the floats and banners, the boys and girls lined up for the procession, and the young men readying the racks of fireworks in the middle of the streets. Leaning over me, her voice dark with sarcasm, she asks, every year, “So you think the festa is dying

out?" I say in the book that the festa is waning, Antoinette reminds me. "Looks pretty good to me," she goes on, "and next year, Father says. . ." Antoinette reports some new plan for the annual celebration, perhaps a bigger float, better rides or fireworks, more lights. Exhausted at the end of the long (and usually quite hot) night of marching through the streets we find each other again. "When are you going to take that out of the book?" Antoinette wants to know. She is very passionate about this.

Antoinette's accusation has long troubled me. The claim by ethnographers that the people one was studying were about to vanish from the earth was a standard trope of early anthropology. The anthropologist had just arrived in time to preserve a last glimpse of a primitive and disappearing world; he or she was the last person to behold the premodern paradise, before the fall. Ethnography became a series of prelapsarian postcards. Such claims still appear occasionally in contemporary work, but critics of anthropology have effectively uncovered the political implications of this salvage approach to the ethnographic enterprise.¹⁸ The romanticism of the twilight elegies of the end of cultures obscured the historical forces that had contributed to changes in the local culture, including often enough the colonial activities of the researcher's own nation, but predating this too. The narratives also denied people the dignity of agency in their own history and experience, overlooking the ways that they were resisting or creatively adapting to changing social conditions. Indeed, the stories served to take these others out of history, situating them in a moment before time, before they descended into history (which is to say into our history). Ultimately, the myth of disappearing cultures served colonial interests, on the one hand, by presenting the end of a world as inevitable, and served to legitimate the presence and work of the ethnographer, on the other, as a kind of preservationist. Was I guilty of this? Now, with the prospect of a new edition, I had the opportunity to do what Antoinette had been asking me to do for years.

I can understand why Antoinette insisted that the festa was still as strong as ever. She had moved away from the community as a young woman, and the annual event was important to her as a homecoming. It had always been there, and since she was a girl her summers had been organized around these days. But I did have good reason in the early 1980s to think that the festa was not going to be around much longer. The crowds were dwindling. The old Italians in the neighbor-

hoods were dying. Their children, who had moved away to the suburbs, seemed less and less interested in coming back, always more apprehensive about the safety of the neighborhood. Only occasionally were there Ferris wheels at the festa now, or outdoor food stands, and then they were pretty shoddy. The feast on 115th Street would not make it as a tourist attraction, I was certain, because it is one thing for out-of-towners to go to the San Gennaro festival in the middle of Greenwich Village, another to travel by the Lexington Avenue local to East Harlem. So I assumed the days of the festa to Our Lady of Mount Carmel were numbered.

I had not foreseen the arrival of the Haitians. How could I? A few Haitian pilgrims were already coming to East Harlem from Brooklyn in the 1970s, but their numbers sharply increased over the next decade. There is a church dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Greenpoint-Williamsburg (founded as an offshoot of the church on 115th Street) and another one in the Belmont section of the North Bronx, and at first Haitian pilgrims traveled around the city visiting each representation of the Madonna of Mount Carmel, who is also the patroness of Haiti. But the migrants came to prefer Harlem's Madonna, perhaps because she most closely resembles the figure of the Virgin who is said to have appeared over a palm tree on the island as she is depicted in Haitian Catholic iconography. Haitian visitors who did not live in East Harlem journeyed to the festa in long pilgrimages from Brooklyn by car, chartered bus, and subway.¹⁹

More Haitians now attend the annual festa than do Italians. The priests at Mount Carmel open the church to Haitian groups by special request throughout the year and allow them to spend the night there in vigils. Haitian families move through the inner passageways of the church and rectory with easy familiarity during the festa. Haitian altar boys participate in official ceremonies at the event; the Haitian national anthem is played (along with the Italian and American) at the start of the processions of the Madonna; the Haitian flag is carried in the streets. The Madonna's older Italian-American devout are impressed by the newcomers' piety and by their ability to sing and pray "so beautifully" in Latin, in the words of one of Mount Carmel's priests. Haitian pilgrims walk behind the statue through the streets, reciting the rosary in French and raising their arms to the heavens during the fierce fireworks displays that greet the Madonna at various points along her route.

Mount Carmel's chroniclers treat the appearance of the Haitian pilgrims from Brooklyn as something of a mystery and a miracle, an uncanny event. Suddenly, one year, as Italian Americans at the church say, crowds of Haitians began coming, completely unexpectedly, to the annual celebration of the feast (from Brooklyn, no less, which in Harlem can seem as far away as Haiti itself). When they talk about this, Italian Americans use such phrases as "as far as I can determine" to mark the strangeness of this turn in Mount Carmel's history. The uncanniness of the moment is then used as a way of absorbing the surprising appearance of the Haitian pilgrims into another, older narrative, about Italian Harlem itself. The arrival of the Haitians, one church worker told me, is not really that surprising, for "this site has always been favored by heaven"; she went on to allude to some of the miracles worked at the church by Harlem's Madonna in recent years, a number of which la Madonna performed on behalf of Haitians. Haitians are thus called on as witnesses to the power of the Italian Madonna in what used to be (but is no more) Italian Harlem. Their presence confirms (as it embodies) the enduring presence of the Madonna and the enduring power of a place—in the memory of Antoinette and her friends—that had once been special because it was Italian.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel appears in Haiti's Vodou pantheon as the powerful figure Ezili Dantò, and a fair amount of Vodou practice takes place during the annual feast now. Some visitors from Brooklyn write petitions for help in thick gray pencil strokes on the statues in the church and leave offerings of burnt food in the plaster folds of the saints' garments; feasts of tropical dishes prepared in honor of the spirits or in thanksgiving for a favor granted (a way of relating to sacred figures that Harlem's Italians would certainly recognize) are shared with strangers on the streets in front of the church—indeed, one year, in the church's courtyard. Italian Americans deny that any of this is happening. Although they are deeply concerned about Puerto Rican *santeros*, practitioners of Santería, who occasionally visit the church and whom Italian Americans accuse of trying to steal power from the Madonna, Italian Americans at Mount Carmel steadfastly look away from the evidence of Vodou. They say that Vodou practices represent the handiwork of only a "few crazy ones." I was told by an Italian-American custodian that the writings on the statues were just expressions of teenage love, even though she could see as

clearly as I could that they were entreaties for assistance from the spirits. All the evidence of their own eyes to the contrary, Italian Americans involved today with the festa flatly assert, as one priest told me, "Haitians are not involved in Vodou."

Such differences in the way Haitians and Puerto Ricans have been treated at the church have to do with the precise moments when Italians encountered the two different groups. Because they did not live in the neighborhood, the Haitians never posed a direct threat to the Italian sense of place, whereas the transformation of Italian Harlem into Spanish Harlem meant a profound recasting of the identity of the neighborhood and signaled the end of Italian-American dominance there. Italian Americans tend to hold Puerto Ricans responsible for the passing of Italian Harlem, which has been one way for the second and third generations to deny the fact that Italians—that they—chose to move away from Harlem when they could afford to, for better housing and schools for themselves and their children, not because they were pushed out. The moral force of the *domus* makes such choices hard to admit, though, so Puerto Ricans have been assigned blame for what the children of the *domus* cannot bear. Haitians, on the other hand, did not come into *Italian* Harlem but into a special place of cherished memory to which Italian Americans of the second and third generations were themselves "returning," even if they had never lived there, in order to express their respect for their grandparents' and great-grandparents' struggles, faith, and achievements. The Haitians were not seen as taking anything away. So the newcomers were not assimilated to a narrative of loss and betrayal—indeed, just the opposite, as the stories of their miraculous appearance made clear.²⁰

This looks like the next chapter in the story of the Madonna of 115th Street.²¹ During the July celebrations in Harlem, Haitian and Italian-American women wash each other's face with wet cloths, an Italian band plays the Haitian national song, Haitian pilgrims sing Latin hymns that the grandchildren of the immigrants never learned, Puerto Rican neighbors look down upon the Madonna from their windows and fire escapes, and Italians are moved by Haitian piety. I hope it makes Antoinette happy that I have included this coda. The festa is not disappearing. But the Madonna's world has changed. She hears requests now that are at once both familiar to her from the earlier days in *cara* Harlem—because all people want to be happy in love, to

have work, to enjoy peace at home and an end to family quarrels, to be well in mind and body—and specific to the needs and history of the Haitian migrants. She learns about children and grandchildren back in Haiti, in addition to the woes of elderly Italian Americans and their worried middle-aged children. So it turns out that the Madonna is as exposed as the rest of us are to the unexpected and unforeseen in life and in history, that her world changes, and that even her identity—she who is now both Madonna and Ezili Dantò—is not singular or stable. This is what joins the Madonna and her pilgrims into a common lot, this is the ground I stood on with the people with whom I spoke, and this is what makes us all recognizable to each other, in heaven and on earth.

The ideas in this new introduction were all talked through with Amy Koehlinger, and it is to her that this second edition of *The Madonna of 115th Street* is dedicated, in gratitude and love.

NOTES

1. These comments on the discourse of the dangerous archive in the self-representations of the early generations of professional historians draw on Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). Smith writes, "Descriptions of archival practices added a sense of forbidden knowledge and images of middle-class sexual prowess to the configuration of historical study as work and civic virtue" (120). Archives, she says, "provided a place where scenarios of pollution and danger might be envisioned" (119).

2. "The past," says philosopher of history Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "or more accurately pastness—is a position": *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 15. My thinking about these questions has also been helped by David William Cohen, *The Combing of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

3. Smith, *The Gender of History*, 138. Accounts of agonies in the archives stressed the work's "isolation, alienation, separation from friends . . . early hours, the scarcity and poor quality of documents . . . exhausting schedules for research trips, difficult relations with archivists," all cast in metaphors of "endurance, access, and control" (125).

4. My understanding of this rich and necessary term—*lifeworld*—owes much to the anthropologist Michael Jackson's discussion of it in "Introduction: Phenomenology, Radical Empiricism, and Anthropological

Critique." *Things as They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 7–8.

5. For a helpful review of the discussions surrounding the term *popular religion*, see Leonard Norman Primiano, "Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife," *Western Folklore* 54, no. 1 (January 1995): 37–56. An excellent example of how far the study of popular religion has come in terms of its theoretical apparatus (with some trenchant observations about the old theoretical impasses) is Paolo Appolito, *Apparitions of the Madonna at Oliveto Citra: Local Visions and Cosmic Drama*, trans. William A. Christian, Jr. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). The preoccupation within religious studies with textuality has been challenged in recent years by new interests in ritual, image, and material culture, in all the various areas of study.

6. Because the normative distinction between spirituality and religion—with all that this means for marking the border between good and bad, tolerable and intolerable forms of religious practice and expression—is so embedded in our languages and so ubiquitous across the culture, it is both easy and difficult to cite particular instances of it. Two rich and highly influential examples are Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), and James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995, orig. pub. 1981).

7. This section of the introduction draws on a number of recent reviews of the history of the modern study of religion, including David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India, and the "Mystic East"* (London: Routledge, 1999); Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Donald S. Lopez, ed., *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of the Self Under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992); J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Jonathan Z.

Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianity and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Mark C. Taylor, ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion After Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

8. On the religious roots of this horror, see Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). Sells comments that "the human capacity for acknowledging religiously based evil is profoundly tenuous" (11). This incapacity seems to me less a human constant than a matter of how the religious landscape has been mapped in the West over the last two centuries—a matter of theory and history, in other words, not a dimension of the human soul.

9. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); William A. Christian, Jr., *Person and God in a Spanish Valley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, orig. pub. 1972); Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: G. Braziller, 1978); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976); Pierre-Jakez Hélias, *The Horse of Pride: Life in a Breton Village*, trans. June Guicharnaud (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978). For useful reviews of developments in the field of American religious history in the past two decades, see Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart, eds., *New Directions in American Religious History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and Thomas A. Tweed, ed., *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

10. My thinking here has been influenced by Michael Jackson's reading of William James's notion of "radical empiricism." Jackson describes radical empiricism like this: "Lived experience overflows the boundaries of any one concept, any one person, or any one society. As such, it brings us to a dialectical view of life which emphasizes the interplay rather than the identity of things, which denies any sure stading to thought by placing it always within the precarious and destabilizing fields of history, biography, and time. . . . Lived experience encompasses both the 'rage for order' and the impulse that drives us to unsettle or confound the fixed order of things. . . . [Such a] conception of experience avoids narrowing down the field of experience to either the subject or the object, theory or practice, the social or the individual,

thought or feeling, form or flux." Michael Jackson, *Paths Towards a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and the Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 2. See also Jackson's introduction to *Things as They Are*, 1-50. In James's words, "To be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its construction any element that is not directly experienced nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced. For such a philosophy, the relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation experienced must be accounted as 'real' as anything else in the system." "A World of Pure Experience," in William James, *Writings 1902-1910* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1159-82. Sentences quoted are from p. 1160.

11. I am not sure who first used the term *lived religion*. The first collection with this title (that I know of) is David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). If Hall did not invent the term, he certainly is responsible for making it a major part of the contemporary conversation about religion.

12. As the anthropologists John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff write, "Culture always contains within it polyvalent, potentially contestable messages, images, and actions. It is, in short, a historically situated, historically unfolding ensemble of signifiers-in-action, signifiers at once material and symbolic, social and aesthetic." *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Boulder: Westview, 1992), 27.

13. The anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner writes, "any form of human action or interaction would be an instance of 'practice' insofar as the analyst recognized it as reverberating with features of asymmetry, inequality, domination, and the like in its particular historical and cultural setting. . . . Human activity regarded as taking place in a world of politically neutral relations is not 'practice.'" *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 12. See also James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

14. For Winnicott's discussion of this intermediate or transitional space and of the quality of creativity that takes shape within it, see the essays collected in *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1971).

15. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1967), 17-18.

16. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968), 72.

17. The spirit of this paragraph was profoundly shaped by Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic, 1985).

18. See, for example, Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How*

Anthropology Makes Its Object (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), as well as the various essays in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

19. The next several paragraphs borrow from Robert A. Orsi, "The Religious Boundaries of an In-between People: Street Feste and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned Other in Italian Harlem, 1920-1990," in Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 257-88; my discussion of the arrival of Haitian devout in East Harlem is on pp. 273-76.

20. *Ibid.*, 269-73, for a more extended discussion of relations between Italian Americans and Puerto Ricans in East Harlem, especially around the figure of Mount Carmel.

21. Haitian participation in the annual feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the subject of an excellent essay by Elizabeth McAlister, "The Madonna of 115th Street Revisited: Vodou and Haitian Catholicism in the Age of Transnationalism," in R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner, eds., *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 123-60.



Women carrying tiered structures of candles during the procession, ca. 1938

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