

SEMINAR SERIES – Work-in-Progress

1–2.30 pm FRIDAY 26 OCTOBER

Comparative Perspectives on Reconciliation: South Africa, Indonesia and Timor Leste

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My presentation grows out of a long term interest in the workings of social memory, and concerns the still emergent field of transitional justice. Since the 1970s, more than 20 countries have held Truth and Reconciliation Commissions to deal with traumatic and violent events of the past, or to ease the transition from authoritarian regimes which ruled by terror to democratic governments. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions focus on the felt need to uncover hidden memories of past traumas, and to break the culture of silence, denial and impunity created by terror. The question of how people are to continue living together after atrocities have been committed is of profound moral import, but the drive toward reconciliation is complicated by many factors: the political fragility of a new regime, the extent to which those who constituted or benefited from the old order remain in positions of power, the hindrances even to establishing what actually happened, and thus what it is that a nation should be coming to terms with, are just some of them. The resulting processes require a great deal of innovation, and their outcomes are necessarily uncertain. But when people innovate, they may also find it useful to seek for legitimacy in certain ideas, models, or precedents that are already available to them in the local cultural repertoire. How different, in each socio-political context, are the cultural resources that people have to draw on in processes of reconciliation, and how may this affect outcomes? That is the question I attempt to address in this presentation, by way of three contrasting cultural contexts: South Africa, Indonesia and Timor Leste.

Biographical information

Roxana Waterson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, where she has been teaching since 1987. She did her Ph. D. in Social Anthropology at New Hall, Cambridge (1981), and has done fieldwork with the Sa'dan Toraja people of Sulawesi (Indonesia) since 1978. Her publications include *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in Southeast Asia* (3rd Edn, Thames & Hudson, 1997); *Southeast Asian Lives: Personal Narratives and Historical Experience* (Singapore/Athens, Ohio: Singapore University Press/Ohio University Press, 2007); and 'Trajectories of Memory: Documentary Film and the Transmission of Testimony', *History and Anthropology* 18/1:51-73 (March 2007). Her ethnographic monograph on the Sa'dan Toraja, *Paths and Rivers: Sa'dan Toraja Society in Transformation*, will be published by KITLV, Leiden, in 2008. She has been teaching critical and practical courses on visual ethnography since 2002, and is currently making a video about the now almost extinct indigenous religion of the Toraja, Aluk To Dolo. Her other current interests include social memory, life history and childhood research.

ALL WELCOME

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