

AMSS 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

Cosponsored by  
Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT  
October 27 – 29, 2006

Abstract Only – Work in Progress

**“Native Orientalist: The Ethics of the  
Production of Knowledge in Anthropology”**

**By: Zareena Grewal, Ph. D.  
(Yale University, CT)**

Edward Said, in a lecture given at the American Anthropologists Association (AAA), commented that across disciplinary boundaries “the customary way of doing things both narcotizes and insulates the guild member. I cannot say whether it is now possible for anthropology as anthropology to be different, that is, to forget itself and to become something else as a way of responding to the gauntlet thrown down by imperialism and its antagonists.” This paper attempts to examine the possibilities of *native* or *insider* anthropology which relocates the discipline on the divided border of an imperial history by approaching the canon of anthropology critically and extracting the concepts and methodological skills in order to develop a new kind of project. How does this sense of moral urgency inform how *native* scholars relate to disciplinary canons; how does one learn to read against the grain of texts, and to penetrate into the submerged, alternative, and contrapuntal voices within those canons? Aihwa Ong argues that if we understand power in Foucault’s sense, as capacities animated in relations rather than an abstract force possessed by individuals, then the subjects of our research can exercise power in the production of knowledge. However, the mere inclusion of scholars from other traditions does not preclude the reproduction of the colonizing gaze and hierarchical power relations because western academic training often transforms students with diverse cultural perspectives into practitioners of a standardized anthropology based on theoretical assumptions and culture-bound models that remain relatively unchallenged by other perspectives (Fahim 1982: xv). Although Islam has a rich intellectual tradition, complete with canons, historiographies and disciplinary formations of its own, the project of treating it as more than an object of analysis by integrating it into academic analyses is difficult and poses a number of challenges and questions. First, scholars must determine what is analytically substantive from this “other” tradition. Indigenous cultural analyses have a long history of influencing anthropological inquiries, however, Hussein Fahim wonders if *local* autobiographies, travel writings and descriptions of daily life should count as *Islamic anthropology*. Even theoretical models that systematically delineate social patterns (such as the analyses of inheritance produced by Muslim jurists, or legal theories about the dynamism of custom, or theological exegeses of the Qur’anic culture concept) still pose challenges in how they could be used by anthropologists.