

# GRADUATE COLLOQUIUM

## DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Monday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016  
11:30-12:50  
Cornett A125

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### **The Girl with Two Souls: Moments of Translational Indeterminacy on an Indonesian Island**

Much of what we know of the societies and cultures studied by anthropologists is the product of translation. This includes most proximately our own translations from ethnographic encounters, literature and other media. But our 'primary materials' themselves often already engender an act of translation, a point that has been emphasized in the recent scholarship on Southeast Asia. This has included Islamic translations from Arabic to Malay, or Javanese; Buddhists working between Pāli and Thai; Brahmins and others reworking Sanskrit in Old Javanese; aid workers interpreting between English and Indonesian; and so on. Regional specifics aside, it seems clear that translation is a crucial factor in our ability to appreciate the complexity of other people's practices. The question I wish to ask is whether our increasingly nuanced attention to this complexity is matched by our theoretical grasp of translation as an aspect of critical enquiry. Reflecting on recent ethnographic research on the Indonesian island of Bali, the paper will address this question with specific reference to Quine's account of translational indeterminacy. It will be argued that Balinese uses of Sanskrit and Old Javanese terminology have played on the possibility of what Quine described in terms of multiple 'translation manuals'. As a consequence, present day Balinese have been able to embody the ideals of a state bureaucratic Hinduism, while simultaneously cultivating a set of older aims and sensibilities that are at odds with this normalized form of religiosity. The paper will conclude with a series of questions extrapolating from the Balinese case to wider issues of translation as they pertain to ethnography as a critical practice.

**EVERYONE WELCOME.**