Asian settings. views about natural disasters have been honed in non-South Asian settings and their parent organizations as well as the interpolated tropes and narratives that are launched through print and electronic media. Thus public memory is assumed to be complex in origin, filled with contradictions and stratified in its reception. The small town of Iowa City suffered through serious floods in 1993 and 2008, and a tornado ripped through the central business district in 2006. In the same period, but on a much larger scale, the countries of South Asia were hit hard by floods, earthquakes, droughts and cyclones and by the 2004 tsunami. The conditions and consciousness of loss, however, and the record of aid received and restitution made, differ in different national and local settings, and no two disasters are the same. Among the differences that arise are distinctive local and national narratives that explain why a disaster has occurred. These narratives can go beyond restating the scientific causes to suggest deeper, sometimes darker ones—for example, negligence, corruption, malevolent fate—and to trigger demands for abstract remedies like justice, retribution and penance. While the exploration of the meanings and moralities that accompany natural disasters is not new, it has only recently become the subject of scholarly investigation in South Asia.

This workshop focuses on interpretations of South Asia disasters with a comparative glance at Hurricane Katrina. The speakers explore the space that opens up between the voices of those who directly bear suffering and losses (i.e. disaster victims or affectees) and those who arrive from outside in order to report on, to comfort, to compensate or sometimes to exploit the losses. These outsiders—journalists, relief workers, officials, politicians and others—characteristically reframe disasters to interpose their own compelling versions of events. Surprisingly, these versions often overwhelm local voices and narratives to become the most enduring and widespread accounts of disasters, even to the extent of infiltrating affectees’ own memories.

The workshop organizers define “public memory” broadly to mean the interpretations made by local or foreign relief workers and their parent organizations as well as the interpolated tropes and narratives that are launched through print and electronic media. Thus public memory is assumed to be complex in origin, filled with contradictions and stratified in its reception. The speakers who address these issues in the workshop are not confined to South Asian experts but include several whose views about natural disasters have been honed in non-South Asian settings.

His most recent book is a collection of essays (co-edited with Balmurli Natrajan), Against Stigma: Comparing Caste and Race in an Era of Global Justice (2009). His earlier works include Nature in the Global South: Environmental Projects in South and Southeast Asia (co-edited with Anna L. Tsing, 2003) and the monograph Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of 1943-1944 (1982). He is currently working on a history of American investigative epidemiology and smallpox control in the developing world.

Contact: paul.greenough@uiowa.edu

BRIAN J. MILLER is Ph.D. Candidate in History at the University of Iowa and has training in comparative and “crossing borders” topics. His archival research is presently underway in Turkey, where he is studying the social and national impact of returning Turkish migrants on their homeland after long residence in Germany in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Contact: brian-miller-1@uiowa.edu

HARISH NARAINDAS is an associate professor of sociology, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is adjunct associate professor of International Studies, University of Iowa, and he has visited Iowa City regularly since 2003. He is also a joint-appointments Professor in the Department of Anthropology, South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany. His current work revolves around his undergraduate facets of Ayurveda, bioterrorism, a comparative study of birthing practices in India and the US, and the question of equity in relief in post-tsunami in Sri Lanka. He has published extensively in leading journals on tropical medicine, smallpox, childbirth, and Ayurveda.

Contact: harish_naraindas@yahoo.com

EDWARD SIMPSON is a senior lecturer in social anthropology, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, School of Oriental and African Studies, London. Dr. Simpson received his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the London School of Economics in 2001. He is the editor or co-editor of three collections and is the author of Muslim Society and the Western Indian Ocean: The Seafarers of Kachchh (London: Routledge, 2006). He is particularly interested in the anthropologies of history, religion, and natural disaster in India. At SOAS, he teaches courses on research methodology, migration and diaspora, and the ethnography of South Asia. He is the reviews editor for the journal Contemporary South Asia. He also is co-editor of a series called Society and History in the Indian Ocean published jointly with Hurst and Columbia University Press.

Contact: es7@soas.ac.uk

JENNIFER TRIVEDI is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at the University of Iowa. She is currently carrying out fieldwork in Biloxi, Mississippi. Her research focuses on pre-disaster vulnerability and on long-term recovery strategies and class status in post-Katrina Biloxi.

Contact: jennifer-trivedi@uiowa.edu

This workshop is funded by the US Department of Education through an Undergraduate Studies International and Foreign Language UISFL grant to the South Asian Studies Program. Other sponsors include the Global Health Studies Program, the South Asian Studies Program, International Programs and the Department of History.

Contact: Heidi Vekemans in advance at 319-335-3862.
The December 26, 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake with an epicenter off the west coast of Sumatra was the third largest earthquake ever recorded. The quake triggered devastating tsunamis along the coasts bordering the Indian Ocean, killing over 230,000 people in fourteen countries, and inundating coastal communities with waves up to 100 feet high. Sri Lanka was one of the countries hardest hit. 35,000 died immediately and more than half a million persons were displaced for years.

Lecture: “Monuments Living and Dead: Modes of Memorializing the Tsunami in Sri Lanka”
Presented by Harish Naraindas, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi