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TOWARDS A NEW COMPARATIVE METHODOLOGY IN RELIGIOUS  
STUDIES

The field of comparative religious studies has a negative reputation in the broader umbrella of religious studies.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the failings of past comparative endeavors – which this article will detail – there is an imperative within the study of religion that comparisons among religions continue to be done: the act of comparison allows the comparativist and the readers to understand the original comparands in even greater depth than individual analysis. As a religious studies researcher, I believe that one of the duties of religious studies scholarship is to seek to understand the individual components that comprise a religion – practice, belief, and artifact – and (ideally) the religion as a whole. While the latter may be too lofty of an aspiration, it remains a goal of religious studies.

This article argues that comparative religious studies, as a discipline of religious studies, is an integral step to understanding individual religions, as well as the overarching concept of *religion* at all. Not only is there an imperative within the field of religious studies to continue doing comparative projects, but there is an imperative to do these projects *well*. Therefore, the task of the present article is to explain past issues in comparative religion, and to outline what a responsible comparative project might look like.

To do this, I draw heavily on various texts by Jonathan Z. Smith, Wendy Doniger's *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*, and Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray's edited *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*. While this article will argue for comparative projects in general within religious studies, an emphasis will be placed on comparative mythology as a chosen example of comparative work.

When doing comparative work in religious studies, it is crucial to not overstate the similarities or differences, and to point to the historical and culture-specific elements that contribute to the construction of each individual religious practice, belief, or artifact in question. However, to keep from falling into the bottomless pit of comparative work, it is also necessary to keep in mind the implications of doing the comparative project at all, and to attempt

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara A. Holdrege, "What's Beyond the Post? Comparative Analysis as Critical Method," In *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, edited by Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 78-79.

to understand the reasoning behind placing those two specific comparands in conversation with each other.

What is significant about comparative projects, and specifically comparative projects of religious myths, is that they seek to uncover the widespread responses to shared, cross-cultural experiences, which express “modalities of cosmogonic themes.”<sup>2</sup> The intention of a comparative project, in part, is to offer a “refinement of debate” within religious studies: to get closer and closer to an understanding of the two individual comparands.<sup>3</sup>

Before a comparative textual analysis of two myths can take place, issues within the field of comparative religious studies must be addressed to ensure the development of a responsible comparative study. Contemporarily, the primary issues concerning comparative religious studies pertain to ideological assumptions derived from the postmodern and postcolonial movements, and to older comparative models’ inadequate use of theory. The rest of this article will be dedicated to explaining the problems of past comparative methodology, the postmodernist and postcolonialist responses to these models, the argument for continued comparison within religious studies, and the formulation of a responsible comparative method.

The field of comparative religious studies has acquired a negative stigma due to past irresponsible models. According to Jonathan Z. Smith in “In Comparison a Magic Dwells,” comparative religious studies “has been chiefly an affair of the recollection of similarity...the issue of difference has been all but forgotten.”<sup>4</sup> After surveying 2,500 years of anthropological comparative studies, Smith attempted to map out a paradigm for comparison. He established four basic models of comparison, each of which were inadequate as comparative activities: ethnographic, encyclopaedic, morphological, and evolutionary.<sup>5</sup>

The ethnographic model was based on “travelers’ impressions,” and functions as an anthropological means to overcome strangeness (e.g. Bronislaw Malinowski). Essentially, ethnographic comparisons lack systematization, are idiosyncratic, and serve to describe what is encountered away from home as surprisingly similar or dissimilar. The encyclopaedic model consisted of contextless lists “held together by mere surface associations in which the overwhelming sense is that of the exotic.” Encyclopaedic comparisons are not limited by the external circumstances of travel (like ethnographic comparisons are), and they encourage cross-cultural comparisons. However, data within the encyclopaedic tradition are compared solely due to their coexistence within an arbitrary category, there is no clear method for how the comparison is to be conducted, and context is irrelevant.

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<sup>2</sup> William E. Paden, “Elements of a New Comparativism,” In *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, edited by Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 185.

<sup>3</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 21. Emphasis his.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-25.

The morphological model was more complex in regard to theoretical assumptions, allowed for a hierarchical organization of individual phenomena, and was the most adequate of the models regarding comparative studies (e.g. Mircea Eliade). However, the morphological approach was designed to exclude historical context. The evolutionary model addressed the change of phenomena over time in response to adaptation to a given environment, but has no “thorough application to cultural phenomena.” The evolutionary approach to comparisons combined the morphological, ahistorical approach with a temporal framework, which

allowed the comparativist to draw his data without regard to time or place and, then, locate them in a series from the simplest to the more complex, adding the assumption that the former was chronologically as well as logically prior.<sup>6</sup>

In the past two decades, three newer proposals for comparative studies have been made, though each of these has been found to be a variant of an older model.<sup>7</sup> The three new proposals were: statistical, structural, and “systematic description and comparison.” The statistical method provides little by way of rules for comparison, identifies the comparands as existing within an unchanging frame of reference, and is resembles too closely either the ethnographic or the encyclopaedic models. The structural method is a more complex subset of morphology, though now paired with Marxist rather than Idealist presuppositions. The systematic description is merely an elegant form of the ethnographic model.

Furthermore, Barbara A. Holdrege, in “What’s Beyond the Post? Comparative Analysis as Critical Method,” identifies three main problems among the past modes of comparative analysis: insufficient attention to differences, insufficient attention to the diachronic dimension, and insufficient attention to context.<sup>8</sup> These three problems of past comparative analyses address how past studies have been concerned primarily with the common features and structural similarities among religious phenomena and do not pay enough attention to the differences of each tradition; how religious phenomena have been abstracted from history and treated as static, timeless structures; and how there is inadequate attention given to “the distinctive contours of each specific religious manifestation.”

Within religious studies scholarship, the method of comparativism has become associated with the “sins of the discipline”: colonialism, essentialism, theologism, and anti-contextualism.<sup>9</sup> These failings of early religious comparativism are due, in part, to the once privileged standpoint of the comparativist who believed it be their duty to objectively describe, classify, and compare ‘other peoples’ and their beliefs against the white Protestant’s.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 25-35.

<sup>8</sup> Holdrege, “What’s Beyond the Post?”

<sup>9</sup> Paden, “Elements of a New Comparativism,” 182.

<sup>10</sup> Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray., editors, In *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 2.

As a response to the failings of older religious comparativisms, postmodern critiques emerged, such as Jacques Derrida's and Mircea Eliade's deconstructionism. Eliade's deconstructionist strategy attempted to undermine the hegemony of "White Man's Reason," to oppose the metanarratives espoused by the Enlightenment, and to demonize modernist thought.<sup>11</sup> Though it is tempting to read Eliade's deconstructionism as a successful critique of the Enlightenment or modernist thinkers, in their construction of metanarratives, he himself was "constructing his own White Man's metanarrative."

The ideological claims of postcolonialism and postmodernism have simultaneously acted as a problem and a solution for the field of comparative religious studies. The application of postmodern thought to the analytic religious worldview is "problematic at best" since it seeks to denounce order in favor of establishing 'otherness' and 'difference.'<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, postmodernism wishes to deconstruct grand narratives and theories in favor of an uncategorizable and non-fixed reality, characterized by multivocality and infinite interpretations.<sup>13</sup>

Patton and Ray describe Derrida's deconstructionism and its profound impact on the field of religious studies, such that "words appear no longer to be connected to the world but to be merely unrooted signifiers, shifting counters in the many language games we play."<sup>14</sup> While postmodernists may applaud this sentiment as a truth of human existence, this article, and other scholars, argue instead that "the self-indulgent pursuit...of talking about ourselves talking about other people is one whose time has passed." If the field of religious studies is to take the claims of postmodernism seriously, then "the possibility of describing religious systems with integrity or comparing them to one another is thus permanently compromised," since the religious worldview is nothing if not global, universal, and systematic.<sup>15</sup>

The postcolonial agenda is compatible with the postmodernism agenda in that both regard 'sameness' as demeaning to the aims of individualism; for postcolonialism specifically, regarding two phenomena of different cultures as 'the same' is "a reflection of the old racist, colonialist attitude that 'all wogs look alike.'"<sup>16</sup> Though both postmodernism and postcolonialism reject metanarratives – thus demanding a reality void of overarching theories, categories, or explanation – postcolonialism emphasizes the political dimension of comparative religious studies, problematizing how we view what is 'the same' and what is 'different.' As Doniger points out, the

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<sup>11</sup> David Gordon White, "The Scholar as Mythographer: Comparative Indo-European Myth and Postmodern Concerns," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, edited by Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 48.

<sup>12</sup> Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid; White, "The Scholar as Mythographer," 49.

<sup>14</sup> Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Wendy Doniger, "Post-modern and -colonial -structural Comparisons," In *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 64.

postcolonial critique is overwhelmingly reductive in its assertion of “white guys screwing black guys”; though, in recent years, it has become more nuanced in its questioning of the power of resistance, it remains a “Johnny one-note” to the extent that it remains revolved around issues of power.<sup>17</sup>

Clifford Geertz in “‘I Don’t Do Systems’: An Interview with Clifford Geertz,” by Arun Micheelsen, articulated the critical importance of postmodernism, but emphasized the phenomenon as a “dead end.”<sup>18</sup> Though postmodern scholars have “helped to clarify some of our fundamental concepts, such as culture or interpretation,”<sup>19</sup> the field of postmodernism will not last relying solely on its own merit. Postmodernism has helped to change the direction of most social sciences by clarifying, critiquing, and not allowing simple-minded notions of complex ideas.

However, Geertz argues, as does this paper, that “postmodernism is past its sale date... We should listen and learn from them and then move along.”<sup>20</sup> To be responsible comparativists, we must take seriously the claims of the postmodern and postcolonial critiques, uphold or reject their various premises, and determine new comparative approaches.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the setbacks that the ideological claims of postmodernism and postcolonialism have imparted on the field of comparative religious studies, there is much within these movements that is worth keeping, as they have affected the way we understand scholarship such that we cannot think without their claims in mind.<sup>22</sup> Though postmodernism is often critiqued as going too far in emphasizing difference, and rejecting all metanarratives and all essentializing claims, its “open-ended approach to texts” encourages a wider range of comparison, as does its emphasis on allowing several meanings or patterns to emerge.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, we have learned from the postcolonial critique that the texts scholars publish can have an impact on the people they write about.

All in all, both postmodernism and postcolonialism have given us “a heightened awareness of what we are doing, why, and the dangers involved.”<sup>24</sup> Within the history of the comparative religious studies field, there have been significant difficulties in developing a responsible comparative methodology; however, we know now “there are sharks in the waters of comparison, [and] now that we know they’re there, we can still swim – a bit more cautiously, perhaps.”<sup>25</sup> Smith claims that, now, we know better how to evaluate comparisons, though we have gained little from our

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>18</sup> Arun Micheelsen and Clifford Geertz, “‘I Don’t Do Systems’: An Interview with Clifford Geertz,” *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 14, no.1 (2002): 2-20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>23</sup> Doniger, “Post-modern and -colonial -structural Comparisons,” 63, 70; Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> Doniger, “Post-modern and -colonial -structural Comparisons,” 66, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 67.

predecessors “either the method for making comparisons or the reasons for its practice.”<sup>26</sup>

In exposing the inadequacies of past models, and the postmodernist and postcolonialist critiques of those past models, the task now is to generate a range of responsible models to counter the critiques of “scholars who would condemn the comparative study of religion to a premature demise.”<sup>27</sup> With the postmodern message received, we must continue the task of progressing our field, building on past studies, refining our debates, and attempting to make sense of religions.<sup>28</sup>

The process of comparison itself is an inherent element of human thought and integral to scholarship: we attend to the world “not in terms of objects but in terms of categories. Wherever there is a theory, wherever there is a concept, there is a comparative program.”<sup>29</sup> Cultural awareness of the ‘other’ and of difference is as old as humankind itself; Smith discusses Robert Redfield’s argument that “the worldview of any people consists essentially of two pairs of binary oppositions: MAN/NOT-MAN and WE/THEY.”<sup>30</sup>

Thus, since human experience is inherently comparative, the scholarly endeavor to posit a comparative framework is not intended to impose grand narratives, nor to achieve moral judgement, nor to gain intellectual control over the ‘other’ – as postmodernism and postcolonialism would have us believe – but to “empower mutual dialogue and the quest for understanding.”<sup>31</sup> Patton and Ray state that

to exclude the study of religion from comparative method based on misguided, purist premises of cultural self-containment is to shut down methods that have been logically and uncontestedly available to disciples as diverse as physiology and linguistics.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, Doniger argues against the high moral ground assumed by disciplines derived from the postmodern movement (i.e. feminism and cultural studies) and their prevailing trend that claims that their subject matter (racism, sexism, the class struggle, genocide) “has such devastating human consequences that there is no room for error.”<sup>33</sup> She argues, as does this article, that one would hope that the respect for ‘difference,’ plurality,

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<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Many scholars have begun to formulate new methods of comparative analysis, considering the issues of past comparative studies (e.g. Kimberley C. Patton, Huston Smith, William E. Paden, Laurie L. Patton, Lawrence E. Sullivan, Jonathan Z. Smith, Wendy Doniger, Barbara A. Holdrege, among others). Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*; Holdrege, “What’s Beyond the Post?” 78.

<sup>28</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 25, 29; White, “The Scholar as Mythographer,” 49.

<sup>29</sup> Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the study of religion*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 259.

<sup>31</sup> Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*, *Updated with a New Preface*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 174-175.

and diversity that prevails in the movements of postmodernism and postcolonialism would extend to the methodologies within religious studies, and to academic institutions in general. Doniger states,

the academic world should never be a place where there is only one poker game in town. It should be a place where we can say, as in an ice cream parlor or hamburger joint: 'Make me one with everything' (a phrase that can also be read as a pantheist prayer).<sup>34</sup>

In understanding the issues of comparative methodology and the necessity for it despite its issues, we turn now to addressing the facets of a responsible comparative study – specifically, a comparative analysis between two myths. Doniger argues that eclecticism is essential to the comparativist's methodology, meaning that a responsible comparativist will not rely on only one tool,<sup>35</sup> but will utilize multiple theoretical frameworks in a multidisciplinary approach.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the present comparative study will draw primarily from the theoretical frameworks of three comparative religious studies scholars: Wendy Doniger, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Barbara A. Holdrege.

Specifically, I will be drawing from Doniger's use of metaphors to explain "what comparative mythology...should be,"<sup>37</sup> Smith's concept of 'third term' to address the significance of the scholar's imagination, and Holdrege's method of comparative historical analysis that seeks to place equal weight on tradition-specific analysis, the similarities and differences of the artifacts in comparison, and the cultural interpretation of these elements within the broader religio-cultural matrices "in which they are embedded."<sup>38</sup> In addition, I also argue that a 'fourth term' – which will be explained later on – should be added to the required facets of a responsible comparative project.

A brief description of Doniger's metaphors will contribute to the theoretical framework of a responsible comparative project. Doniger discusses the scholarly lens through which we can understand myths: "the big view (the telescope) is the universalist view sought by Freud, Jung, Eliade; the middle view (the naked eye) is the view of contextualized cultural studies; and the small view (the microscope) is the focus on individual insight."<sup>39</sup> For the comparativist, the individual text is the microscope by which we can see the trees; the act of comparison is the telescope by which we see the forest.

Thus, comparative mythology simultaneously addresses the minutiae of our daily lives and all the concerns within the galaxy.<sup>40</sup> Doniger also discusses the distinction between micromyth and macromyth: the micromyth serves as the pivot of the two things being compared and establishes comparability

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>35</sup> This is in reference to past comparative studies that relied on one theoretical framework (e.g. Levi-Strauss's structuralism or Carl Jung's archetypes).

<sup>36</sup> Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, 172.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>38</sup> Holdrege, "What's Beyond the Post?" 82.

<sup>39</sup> Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

between the two items, whereas the macromyth more closely resembles the entire life of the item, as “a composite of the details of [its] many variants and insights.”<sup>41</sup>

Last of Doniger’s metaphors to be used in a comparative project is that of ‘the implied spider’: Doniger references Geertz’s description of humans as “animal[s] suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.”<sup>42</sup> The implied spider, then, is the original author(s) working within his/her context, spinning a web from his/her experience of the various strands of culture that bear on those experiences. Doniger argues that though “we can never see this sort of spider at work, [and] we can only find the webs, the myths that human authors weave,” we must still believe in the existence of the spider.<sup>43</sup> The fact that we cannot recover the spider does not mean that it did not exist; after all, the spider must have existed in some way “to leave the tracks that we see...the narrative.”<sup>44</sup> Doniger’s metaphors provide important theoretical considerations for comparative methodology: we may view the myth through various scholarly lenses, we can address the common elements of two myths in comparison by way of the micromyth, and we must keep in mind the historical context, or the implied spider, of each myth in question.

Similarly, Smith has important contributions to comparative methodology. Most relevant to the present study is Smith’s discussion of the ‘third term.’ Smith discusses how the enterprise of comparison brings different items together “solely within the space of the scholar’s mind.”<sup>45</sup> Whatever the theoretical reasons of the scholar, the justification for comparison of the two comparands and the lens through which the scholar compares them exists within the scholar’s imagination. Recognizing the ‘third term’ is an integral facet of responsible comparative methodology since it addresses the subjective addition of human thought and experience that seek to encourage a conversation of two potentially unrelated comparands.

In addition to Doniger’s metaphors and Smith’s third term, key facets of responsible comparative study require further explication. Holdrege recognizes that proper attention must be given to differences as well as similarities, and “to diachronic transformations as well as to structural continuities.”<sup>46</sup> Primarily, a responsible comparative study will “neither ignore resemblances nor simplistically collapse them into superficial sameness; and it will neither ignore differences nor magnify them out of proportion.”<sup>47</sup> Smith discusses degrees of ‘otherness’ in which ‘otherness’ is a term of interrelation between something and something ‘else.’<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 100-104.

<sup>42</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, 68

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the comparison of early Christianities and the religions of late antiquity*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 115.

<sup>46</sup> Holdrege, “What’s Beyond the Post?” 79.

<sup>47</sup> Paden, “Elements of a New Comparativism,” 190.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, *Relating Religion*, 275.

Therefore, difference is, “most often, something in which one has a stake.”<sup>49</sup> In conducting a responsible comparative study, recognizing the political and linguistic project of ‘otherness’ is imperative to the goal of comparative studies, and to anthropological studies more broadly, so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with other cultures.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, as comparativists, we must recognize that texts have contexts (i.e. implied spiders), are determined by their contexts, and that, thus, “we lose a great deal when we lose context.”<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, I argue that a responsible comparative endeavor will also include a “fourth term.” In Patton and Ray’s *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, it is stated that in the act of comparison, the two original comparands, “juxtaposed in scholarly discourse, have the potential to produce a third thing, a magical thing, that is different from its parents.”<sup>52</sup> This creation can illuminate truths about both individual elements “in ways that would have been impossible through the exclusive contemplation of either of them alone.”<sup>53</sup> This, I term the “fourth term,” the next component to Smith’s third term. The fourth term addresses the overall significance of placing these two myths in conversation with each other, or the implications that can be drawn from the comparative endeavor. By placing comparand A in conversation with comparand B, and viewing the comparison through the lens of the scholar’s third term, what is produced is the fourth term of the comparative endeavor.<sup>54</sup>

With these facets of a responsible comparative study in mind, we must also define what is meant by ‘myth’ before we address the myths to be compared.<sup>55</sup> For a comparative mythology project, Doniger’s cumulative working definition of myth is a good place to start: myth combines distant and near views; it is greater than the sum of its parts; it expresses cross-cultural human experiences; it expresses both an idea and its opposite; and it reveals basic cultural attitudes.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, in the history of religion, the term ‘myth’ has more often been used to mean ‘truth,’ since, above all, a myth is “a story that is *believed*, believed to be true, and... people continue to believe despite sometimes massive evidence that it is, in fact, a lie.”<sup>57</sup> To conclude this working definition of myth, Doniger states:

The myth balances simultaneously the conviction that each of us is such a tiny part of the universe that nothing we do is real...and the conviction that a picnic with our friends and family is a great thing, not a small thing. Myths form a bridge between the terrifying abyss

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>50</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, 49.

<sup>52</sup> Patton and Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells*, 18.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 35.

<sup>55</sup> According to Smith, “what is lacking, in addition to a superordinate category for comparison is, above all, a rich notion of *myth*,” as the establishment of the category of myth is a prerequisite for comparative mythology. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 86-87.

<sup>56</sup> Doniger, *The Implied Spider*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 2. Emphasis hers.

of cosmological ignorance and our comfortable familiarity with our recurrent, if tormenting, human problems.<sup>58</sup>

Keeping in mind older comparative models' failures, postmodern and postcolonial critiques of comparative religious studies, the argument for comparative projects regardless of its previous shortcomings, and the development of responsible comparative methodologies, the comparatist can finally begin a new comparative endeavor. A comparative mythology project will focus on two myths of interest to the comparatist. Utilizing Smith's third term, the comparative project will seek to view the two myths through a particular lens. For instance, a comparative project may hope to uncover how both myths deal with the development of the understanding of human morality. Doniger's micromyth will be utilized to explain the pivotal point establishing comparability of the two myths.

The fourth term will address the implications that are produced when comparand A and comparand B are placed in conversation with each other. Last of the requirements of a responsible comparative endeavor are the differences of the two comparands or myths (e.g. historical context, culture, religious belief system, relationship with God(s), etc.) and the similarities (e.g. the themes present in each myth). This article has intended to argue, alongside Jonathan Z. Smith, Wendy Doniger, Benjamin C. Ray, Kimberley C. Patton, Barbara A. Holdrege and many others, that comparative religion is necessary to broaden the religious scholars' understanding of religion and provide renewed insight into the self and others – and so, we must do it right.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.