

Anthropology News

Volume 49
Number 8
November 2008

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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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www.anthrosource.net



SECTION NEWS

Recognizing that the association's sections represent the rich diversity of the discipline's subfields, *AN* includes Section News, which provides news of specific relevance to members of each section (eg, summaries of section business meetings, section meeting presentations, section-featured annual meeting lectures). Members are encouraged to make full use of other *AN* editorial sections to report items of more general interest (eg, meeting dates, death notices, commentaries). Contact information for section contributing editors is available in individual columns.

American Ethnological Society

JOANNA DAVIDSON, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Favorite Ethnographies

One of the most frequent comments I hear from fellow anthropologists is: "I wish I had more time to read ethnographies. And even if I did, I wouldn't know where to begin." I can't do anything about time management, but I can perhaps help on the selection issue. I surveyed a wide range of colleagues and asked them "What's your favorite ethnography? Which ethnographies give you the most pleasure to read, inspire your teaching and research efforts, and make you glad that you're an anthropologist?" I'll occasionally use this column to share their responses. Perhaps this will motivate all of us to discover (or rediscover) ethnographic gems.

Carla Jones (U Colorado-Boulder) recommends Suzanne Brenner's *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth and Modernity in Java* (1998). "It is full of fabulous information about a community that thinks about familiar issues, like gender, money and power, in ways that are unique and different from how Americans think of those issues. This makes it a wonderful book with which to teach, because students can relate to the topics, but realize that the ways they think of them are also unique. Brenner's theoretical arguments about capitalism and class are seamlessly interwoven with her descriptions, making it both a great read and a highly sophisticated analysis, showing that great ethnographies don't have to be one or the other."

Bob White (U Montréal) suggests Julie Taylor's *Paper Tangos* (1998). "Taylor tells the story of how she learns to dance tango, but she also explains how the pains of dictatorship are embodied through intersubjective contact and memory. More than any other ethnography I know it combines the personal and the political and shows us how ethnographic observation in local scenes links up to the 'larger impersonal systems' described by Marcus and Fischer."

Daniel Mains (Washington U) endorses Adam Ashforth's *Madumo: A Man Bewitched* (2000). "Since reading it I've found myself constantly recommending it to friends regardless of their interest in anthropology. I've also been searching for ways to fit it into my

courses so I will have an excuse to read it again. *Madumo* is a fascinating story about one man's struggles to deal with family and witchcraft in post-apartheid South Africa. Ashforth has a great talent for detailed descriptions of smells, personalities, food, small talk and everything else necessary to convey a sense of day-to-day life in Soweto. He suggests broader theoretical arguments, but for the most part readers are left to draw their own conclusions about *Madumo's* story and I think this makes the book particularly compelling."

Carla Freeman (Emory U) says, "My favorite ethnography these past couple of years is Donna Goldstein's *Laughter Out of Place* (2003). While Goldstein herself describes her approach as "old fashioned" ethnography, based upon traditional long-term fieldwork in a gritty and often dangerous *favela* in Brazil, it is also startlingly cutting edge. Through the life story of one woman, Gloria, Goldstein offers one of the most eloquent and powerful explications of the dialectics of race, class, sexuality, gender and violence. This book wears its theory lightly but profoundly, and through beautiful prose offers a window into the intricacies of power, subjectivity, and the sometimes jarring ways dark humor resiliently speaks to the lives and feelings of the dispossessed. This is one ethnography I will read again and again not only for the haunting story it tells, but for the subtle and sophisticated weaving of big ideas and the minute details of a human life."

Finally, Ken MacLean (Clark U) recommends Leach's classic *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954). "Leach's account, which he claims to have faithfully reconstructed from memory after the loss of his field notes, provides a dynamic and compelling model of change and identity formation that demonstrates how social structures and individual agency shape one another across time and space. The result is a compelling model that signals an initial attack on the "culture" concept as enshrined in the work of Malinowski and his students. Moreover, the 1964 edition contains a wonderful polemic on works by Gluckman and Gellner that exemplifies the richness of the intellectual disputes of the time."

If you have a favorite ethnography you'd like to recommend, or any comments about this column, please send them to Joanna Davidson (jhd@emory.edu).

Anthropology and Environment Section

LAURA OGDEN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

This month Renzo Taddei applies key ideas from anthropology's understandings of risk and uncertainty to develop frameworks for studying climate change cross-culturally.

Blame: The Hidden (and Difficult) Side of the Climate Change Debate

By Renzo Taddei (State U Campinas, Brazil)

Between 1877 and 1879, Northeast Brazil was crippled by one of the region's most historically significant droughts. Around a half million people may have died due to drought-related famine and epidemics. Many of the region's Catholic-majority inhabitants believed the drought was a form of divine punishment for the moral corruption of society, an idea reinforced in an epistle issued by the local bishop. More than a century later, in January 2004 as I was carrying out fieldwork in the region, extremely intense rains flooded the area, displacing over 100,000 people. During interviews, some of those impacted echoed earlier beliefs that the disaster was the result of divine punishment. This time they pointed to television headlines—animal cloning, NASA's expedition to Mars and the war in Iraq, among other things—as causes for divine discontent. Humans were going beyond their proper sphere of action, they said.

This research called my attention to the role of blame in cultural models about climate. The main international debates on climate change focus almost exclusively on the phenomenon's physical causes, while at the same time there is an enormous ethnographic literature that reveals "blame" to be integral to how societies deal with crises in general, and climate related ones in particular. This reveals a conceptual gap where anthropology can effectively make critical contributions.

Indeed, it seems that the association between climate events and supposed human misdeeds is culturally pervasive and enduring. Of course in some places these beliefs may not be dominant, but they tend to reappear as a strong paradigm in moments of crisis. For instance, Mary Douglas, in *Risk and Blame*, provides ample evidence that this way of dealing with crises is not restricted to tribal and traditional societies but marks Western societies alike. If she is right (and I believe she is), it makes the topic of blame politically relevant to our analyses of societal reactions to climate events and uncertainties.

One example of how blame is associated with climate can be seen in the rejection of climate modeling in water management. As Steve Rayner and his collaborators demonstrated in California and as I witnessed in Brazil, water managers resist incorporating new technologies that increase uncertainty, even if in

the aggregate there are gains in efficiency. As an illustration, imagine a situation where two individuals are in conflict for the water stored in a reservoir: both want the water, but they also want to keep a certain volume saved for future needs. If a climate forecast predicts high probability of heavy rains in the upcoming rainy season, they may use more water in the present, thus resolving the conflict. But since climate forecasts are probabilistic, due to the extreme complexity of the atmosphere, the hydrological models will also become probabilistic. In the long run a forecast will fail, resulting in a water crisis. The public and most politicians don't see the inherent uncertainties of modeling, and in a situation of crisis there is a general expectation that someone is accountable. Not unlike the search for divine causation, the inherent uncertainty of climate modeling may produce an atmosphere where blame is politically expedient (and water managers risk losing their jobs). This context means that it is extremely difficult to convince water managers to use climate-based technologies.

Understanding how blame is present in cultural models about climate, in climate politics and in the local institutionalized ways of addressing crises is, from an anthropological perspective, necessary if the discipline is to make effective contributions to the international debate on climate change. While international debates discuss how much certainty we need to enable political action, a second, equally important question is how much uncertainty our political systems can take before triggering blaming and scapegoating rituals. Similarly, if culturally embedded models frame the idea of climate change as a situation where nature is "punishing" humanity for its misdeeds—carbon emissions, pollution, destruction of forests, reduction of biodiversity and the like—individuals may take this punishment as deserved, which may induce them to assume a posture of resignation and inaction. Naturally, this is a hypothesis to be tested ethnographically.

Please contact Laura Ogden at laura.ogden@fiu.edu to discuss column ideas or submit contributions.

Archeology Division

RANI T ALEXANDER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Please join us at the AD business meeting on Friday, November 21, 7:00-8:00 pm in room Yosemite C. We will be honoring the past service of AD Executive Committee members and welcoming newly-elected AD Executive Committee officers. The AD will present the 2008 Gordon R Willey award to Barbara Voss, assistant professor, Stanford University, for her article "From Casta to California: Social Identity and the Archaeology of Culture Contact," published in *American Anthropologist* 107(3) in September 2005. Immediately following the AD business meeting, Alison Wylie will present the first Patty Jo Watson Distinguished Lecture.

The AD congratulates David Grove (Professor Emeritus, U Illinois Urbana-Champaign), recipient of the 2008 Alfred Vincent Kidder Award for Eminence in the Field of American Archaeology, and Kerry Thompson (U Arizona), winner of the 2008-09 AAA Minority Dissertation Fellowship. The Kidder Award will be presented at the AAA Business Meeting and Awards Ceremony, Thursday, November 20, 7:30-8:30pm.

AAA Annual Meeting Highlights

By Lisa Frink (Program Editor) and Stephen Silliman (Program Editor-Elect)

This year's annual meeting theme (Inclusion, Collaboration and Engagement) has motivated archaeologists to organize a broad range of stimulating and thoughtful sessions. All told, archaeologists will present papers and posters in 15 sessions. The AD is sponsoring two invited sessions for the 2008 program. Christina Halperin and Uzma Rizvi have organized a session titled "Radical Archaeology as Critical Anthropology: Papers Honoring Thomas C Patterson." Carol McDavid and Christopher Matthews have organized a roundtable titled "Dynamics of Inclusion in Collaborative Archaeologies." Both of these sessions bring together an array of research approaches and standpoints with a particular inclusion of international and indigenous scholars. We also look forward to the 22nd annual Ceramic Ecology Symposium organized by Charles C Kolb.

Alison Wylie to Present 2008 Patty Jo Watson Distinguished Lecture

The AD is pleased to announce that the first annual Patty Jo Watson Distinguished Lecture will be presented by Alison Wylie, professor of philosophy, University of Washington, on Friday, November 21, 2008, at 8:00 pm. The lecture is titled "Legacies of Collaboration: Transformative Criticism in Archaeology."

Demands for accountability are transforming archaeology: accountability to descendant communities, to government agencies and private contractors, and to a growing range



Alison Wylie

of public stakeholders who have an interest in archaeological research. What dominates high profile debate about these critical challenges are anxieties about the costs of response to them: research opportunities lost, credibility eroded, and professional autonomy compromised by legal constraints and by intractable conflicts among stakeholders. All too often this obscures local initiatives that illustrate what becomes possible when practice is reconceptualized as a form of intellectual and cultural collaboration. While moral, political and legal commitments are typically the primary motivation for these partnerships, the archaeolo-

gists involved also describe innumerable ways in which their research has been enriched, empirically and conceptually, by extra-disciplinary collaborations; the impact of and justification for such practice is as much epistemic as normative. Wylie explores the epistemic legacies of community-based collaborative practice in archaeology and considers ways in which it puts philosophically consequential pressure on conventional ideals of objectivity.

Alison Wylie specializes in the philosophy of the social and historical sciences, specifically archaeology and feminist philosophy of science. Her publications include *Thinking from Things: Essays in the Philosophy of Archaeology* (2002); *Critical Traditions in Contemporary Archaeology: Essays in the Philosophy, History and Socio-Politics of Archaeology*, co-edited with Valerie Pinsky (1989); "Philosophy of Archaeology; Philosophy in Archaeology," in *The Philosophy of Anthropology and Sociology*, edited by Stephen Turner and Mark Risjord; volume 14, *Handbook of the Philosophy of Science* (2007) and "Moderate Relativism, Political Objectivism," in *The Archaeology of Bruce Trigger: Theoretical Empiricism*, edited by Ronald F Williamson and Michael S Bisson (2006).

Beginning in 1989, the Archaeology Division inaugurated a series of distinguished lectures. In 2008 the AD named the distinguished lecture for Patty Jo Watson, Distinguished University Professor Emerita, Washington University-St Louis, in honor of her prominent record of scholarship. Her studies of prehistoric subsistence, technology, economy and environment in the Near East and in North America broke new ground within processual archaeology, opened the door for the participation of women in science, and continue to inform current theoretical debate. Each lecturer delivers a talk at the annual meeting, and the distinguished lectures may subsequently be published in *American Anthropologist*.

Send news, notices and comments to Rani Alexander, Dept of Sociology and Anthropology, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, NM, 88003-8001; tel 505/646-5809; fax 505/646-3725; raalexan@nmsu.edu.

Association for Africanist Anthropology

JENNIFER E COFFMAN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

India-Africa Forum Summit

By Hudita Mustafa (Harvard U)

Asian superpowers have invested in African projects for decades now, but April of this year marked the first high level governmental summit on India-Africa Partnership. Held in New Delhi and sponsored by the Council of Indian Industry and the Export-Import Bank of India, this event followed meetings held in Uganda, Mozambique and South Africa in the