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FROM THE EDITOR

Anthropologies and Americas

Tom Boellstorff
Editor-in-Chief

ANTHROPOLOGY, "AMERICA," AND THE WORLD

Although not always an explicit topic of discussion, the "America" of *American Anthropologist* is productively polysemous. One could imagine an alternate universe in which we spoke (rather awkwardly) of the *United States Anthropologist* and its parent organization, the "Anthropological Association of the United States." Certainly, the United States has been the dominant referent of "American" with regard to the American Anthropological Association. After all, the AAA was formed as a "national organization" and has always been centered in the United States in terms of membership and administrative structure (AAA n.d.). With regard to *AA*, editorial staff and board members have overwhelmingly been based on the United States. English has always been the language of the journal, and most authors published in *AA* are located in the United States.

Despite this (in many ways intentional) centering of *AA* on the United States, the journal (like the AAA more broadly) has always been shaped by strong cosmopolitan countercurrents. Many early "American" anthropologists were immigrants—not least, Franz Boas. Anthropologists from outside the United States have long participated in the work of the AAA and contributed to the pages of *AA*. Above all, from its very first issue, *AA* presented research on the lives of people outside the United States, past and present. This strong transnational emphasis appeared alongside an attention to American Indians and other minoritized groups. Both of these emphases destabilized dominant, triumphalist narratives of the United States, voicing the stories, experiences, and lifeworlds of those sidelined or ignored in those narratives.

In the contemporary period, leaders in the AAA and those involved with *American Anthropologist* have worked to further transnationalize the association and the journal. When I became editor-in-chief, one of my first acts was to eliminate the fee for non-AAA members to submit manuscripts to *American Anthropologist*. This fee, listed on the website at the time as \$100 but set internally at \$50, provided a minimal amount of income. However, it certainly acted to exclude those without the institutional or personal resources to pay for AAA membership, including both scholars outside the United States and scholars in the United States

not at major research institutions. This policy shift is likely one reason why the number of submissions (and published research articles) from outside the United States has risen under my editorship. I also internationalized the editorial board (about one-third of its members are now from outside the United States); one of many benefits of this is that it makes it easier to get recommendations for high-quality reviewers from outside the United States. Another idea I have explored is a "world anthropologies" occasional series in which authors craft pieces focusing on anthropological work in a non-English language. The article might be published both in English and the language in question, helping *AA* readers gain a greater appreciation for anthropological research outside the United States.

In addition to these innovations, in 2009 I implemented the first non-English abstracts policy in the history of *AA*. Under this policy, authors have had the option to include abstracts in one or two languages other than English, so long as they do all the translations themselves. We have now secured AAA funding to translate abstracts into Spanish even if an author cannot do so. As a result, with the support of the AAA and the Committee on World Anthropologies, I have altered the policy on non-English abstracts. Now, all abstracts of research articles published in *AA* will appear in both English and Spanish. Authors will still have the option of providing one or two additional abstracts in other languages should they wish to do so. This means that all research articles will now have two abstracts, and some will have three or even four abstracts. Because we limit abstracts in *AA* to 200 words, this will not be excessive or distracting. Instead, these short abstracts in multiple languages will help build research communities on a global scale. By always having abstracts in Spanish, we gesture toward a more expansive notion of "American anthropology" that takes all of the Americas as its referent, acknowledging the importance of Latin America in the hemisphere. I am excited by this reframing of "America" in less nationalist (indeed, parochial) terms.

Like all of the steps I and others have taken to internationalize *American Anthropologist*, the inclusion of Spanish abstracts for all research articles is imperfect, part of a larger journey. Spanish is, of course, a colonial language in its own right, dominating over a range of indigenous languages of

the Americas. But a broader issue is that the building of transnational research communities is more than a matter of language. World anthropologies differ not just in the languages used to publish research but in norms for presenting analysis, as well as styles of marshalling evidence and engaging with relevant literatures.

In other words, more is at stake than “translation” in a purely linguistic sense. The goal is not a singular, global research community: within any one discipline, even in a particular language, there exist many research communities with differing interests and goals. The goal is conversation—building linkages across a range of research communities. This means working so that those in a dominant position (in this case, anthropologists based in the United States who publish in English) are true partners in conversation, listening as well as speaking. It also means reaching out to those whose first language of scholarship is not English. My hope is that making Spanish-language abstracts a general feature of *AA* can act as one small step in working creatively toward these goals. Overall, I hope that these Spanish-language abstracts can help to make the “America” of *American Anthropologist* (and the American Anthropological Association) more productively polysemous, marking the research communities represented in *AA* as participating in a greater “America” that is not coterminous with the United States. Such forms of “trans-Americanity” (Saldivar 2011) have already been the subject of important discussions in Latin America and beyond, and linking the vision of *AA* to those discussions is one way to continue the work of transnationalizing “American anthropology.”

IN THIS ISSUE

A fourth set of “The Year in Review” essays appears in this issue of *American Anthropologist*. As before, these essays review trends, publications, and debates within a subfield of anthropology, in this case during the calendar year 2011. Once again, the associate editors of *AA* have selected and advised an outstanding set of scholars, whose hard work provides us with a unique and insightful window into continuing developments in anthropology.

These “Year in Review” essays are followed by eight excellent research articles. That half of these articles are based on fieldwork in Latin America and the Caribbean shows how scholarship published in *American Anthropologist* is “American” in the expansive sense discussed above. In “The Madness of Mothers: Agape Love and the Maternal Myth in Northeast Brazil,” Maya Mayblin examines how notions of “mother love” in Brazil “map closely onto theological uncertainty about the relationship between God and humanity.” Louis Marcelin’s article, “In the Name of the Nation: Blood Symbolism and the Political Habitus of Violence in Haiti,” provides a fascinating counterpoint to Mayblin, as he explores how notions of blood act as “a kind of foundational myth of power at every level of Haitian society.” These articles are followed by two works that engage with questions of contested history and the reappropriation of expert knowledge

with regard to Central American archaeology. Christopher Moreheart investigates “points of convergence and divergence between local and archaeological versions of the past” in his article, “What If the Aztec Empire Never Existed? The Prerequisites of Empire and the Politics of Plausible Alternative Histories.” Different yet resonant issues of truth and expertise appear in “Staged Discovery and the Politics of Maya Hieroglyphic Things” by Matthew Watson. In the article, Watson draws on frameworks from science studies to show how participants in a series of well-known workshops dedicated to the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs have “imagined and constituted a public that helped to legitimate a small group of experts’ initially controversial claims.”

The remaining four research articles move beyond Latin America and the Caribbean to explore a wide range of anthropological concerns. In “Anatomies of Relatedness: Considering Personhood in Aboriginal Australia,” Katie Glaskin draws on fieldwork from Western Australia to “argue that one way of characterizing personhood is as an ontology of embodied relatedness.” Glaskin’s analysis extends a range of debates over personhood in anthropology, notably including the recent proliferation of notions of “dividual” selves. The breadth of forms of anthropological inquiry is well demonstrated by the shift from Glaskin’s approach to that of Marius Warg Næss in “Cooperative Pastoral Production: Reconceptualizing the Relationship between Pastoral Labor and Production.” Here, Næss develops a novel conceptual model for understanding the effect of labor on pastoral production that takes into account, among other things, the fact that “nomadic pastoralists form cooperative herding groups.”

These articles are followed by Sabrina Agarwal’s “The Past of Sex, Gender, and Health: Bioarchaeology of the Aging Skeleton.” Like Næss, Agarwal is interested in reconceptualizing dominant anthropological conceptual frameworks, in this case by showing that “dividing bioarchaeological samples into sex categories as a first step in analysis can obscure significant sources of variation in biological experience.” In the final research article, “Limitations of Language for Conveying Navigational Knowledge: Way-Finding in the Southeastern Solomon Islands,” Richard Feinberg and Joseph Genz continue the emphasis on challenging existing understandings by noting that “most discussions of way-finding have emphasized cognitive schemas that are consciously understood by the navigator and transmitted to apprentice voyagers or curious anthropologists primarily through articulate speech.” In contrast, in their article they provide a detailed exploration of “a case in which a capable navigator could not effectively explain critical environmental cues to an eager researcher” and show how this raises important issues about the relationship between language and knowledge.

These excellent research articles are followed by a wide range of reviews of books, films, public anthropology materials, and a museum exhibit. All told, this issue of *AA* shows wonderfully how anthropology can work to build research communities through the interweaving of careful attention to empirical detail, groundbreaking theoretical insight, and attention to the politics of knowledge.

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The views expressed here are the editor's and are not to be taken as a statement of the American Anthropological Association or its Executive Board.

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