

Myth-teller" [*American Ethnologist*, 1975]), and he was a steady and encouraging presence at the AAA annual meeting for many years, but his best legacy is almost certainly the students whose eyes he opened to seeing the world anthropologically through his career teaching at Louisiana State U. Miles was also the SHA treasurer for many years, helping to keep us solvent through many changes in AAA organization.

We just got the news in the summer, but this spring we lost Barry Michrina. Barry came from a working-class background in Pennsylvania, and is perhaps best known for his wonderfully sensitive book *Pennsylvania Mining Families*. But like Miles, Barry's greatest legacy is the students he taught for over 20 years at Colorado Mesa U—most of whom did not become anthropologists, but took the vision and heart that Barry helped develop out into the world in other pursuits.

Barry and Miles were among the long-time SHA members and leaders who welcomed us into the organization, going on 20 years ago, and we feel privileged to have had the chance to know them. They both encouraged approaching the field with passion and compassion, with the heart as well as the mind, and exemplified the humanistic tradition in anthropology.

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Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology

RONDA BRULOTTE, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

American Aesthetics and Chinese Copies: New Politics of Artisanry in Oaxaca, Mexico

By Alanna Cant (*London School of Economics and Political Science*)

When I began my doctoral fieldwork in 2008 with artisans in Oaxaca, Mexico, I expected to spend much time talking about the United States. Indeed, consumers from the US form a significant part of the market for Oaxacan woodcarvings (*alebrijes*), made in small villages like my field site, San Martín Tilcajete. I was not disappointed: the artisans who graciously opened their homes and workshops to me spent a lot of time and energy imagining and discussing what might capture the attentions of American tourists, collectors and wholesalers.

This orientation towards the United States as a source of income and inspiration is, of course, not a new one for artisans and many others in Mexico; in San Martín, migration to the US forms a longer and perhaps more robust connection to American ways of life. However, since the consolidation of woodcarving as a significant mode of livelihood in the 1990s, this industry has formed another link through which villagers connect to the US. While previous anthropological work has emphasized the economic, political and cultural connections between the two nations, my work explores how the expectations and conventions of North American



A woodcarver works a piece with a machete. Photo courtesy Alanna Cant

indigenous art and aesthetics have become a source of aesthetic inspiration for artisans in San Martín. As some artisans incorporate what North American audiences readily read as the "form and content" of indigeneity into their work, they also mould the ways in which Oaxacan woodcarvings look and are read "at home" in Oaxaca.

Rather than characterizing these aesthetic changes as North American "impacts on" Oaxacan artisanal production, it was clear to me that artisans themselves were creatively and purposefully drawing these aesthetic grammars of indigeneity into the already existing aesthetics of *artesánias* (craftwork) in Oaxaca. I discovered that these aesthetic practices not only enhance artisans' ability to "sell authenticity" to Mexican and North American tourists and collectors, but also have moved villagers to reconsider their own place within both Mexican and global processes of identity and belonging. This materialized in San Martín through the increased energy and commitment of young people to explore and participate in community traditions and a renewed interest in learning the Zapotec language.

While aesthetic practices and politics of artisanry have fomented this new interest in exploring what it means to be Oaxacan, Zapotec and Mexican in the 21st century, they have also drawn San Martín's artisans into global debates about cultural and intellectual property. During my fieldwork, artisans discovered that resin replicas of Oaxacan woodcarvings were being industrially produced in China by an American businessman and sold via New Age and giftware websites and fairs. With help from the Mexican and Oaxacan states, their response was to form a collective trademark union, which they hoped would dissuade further copying in the future.

This case raises many of the problems that anthropologists have identified with attempting to protect cultural content through appeals to intellectual property law: as the resin copies did not overtly claim to be

Oaxacan, Mexican or even indigenous, it was unlikely that intellectual property claims—in any form—were likely to succeed in preventing the replication of the aesthetics of their work.

The language of intellectual property changes the relationship between artisans, their work and each other, while at the same time draws artisans into the state's concerns about Mexico's place within the current global economy. Despite the fact that it was an American who ordered the replica carvings to be produced, the state and media representations of the case focused firmly on the fact that it was Chinese production. In recent years, Mexico has lost its primacy to China as the chief source of imports into the United States. Coupled with increasing economic woes due to the global financial down-turn and the highly publicized drug-related violence in Mexico, the Mexican state is extremely sensitized towards China as a global competitor. By being placed at the heart of these anxieties about Mexico's place in the world, artisans in San Martín are also being reoriented towards other global connections beyond their more traditional relationships with North America. Whether this new mindfulness of China and other regions of the world also influences the aesthetics of Oaxacan woodcarvings remains to be seen.

Please send any comments, suggestions and ideas, including photos, for future columns to Ronda Brulotte at brulotte@unm.edu.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

MARK ALLEN PETERSON AND BONNIE URCIUOLI, CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Language, Health, and Social Justice

By Steven P Black (*Georgia State U*)

Scholars have been researching health and social justice, language and health, and language and social justice for quite some time, but the incorporation of all three foci into a single object of analysis is a recent development. This is a summary of a report on this topic meant for journalists, medical practitioners, and academics. Those who wish to be listed in a directory of scholars doing research on language, health, and social justice or to contribute teaching resources to the compiled report should contact me at sblack@gsu.edu. Below I write about language and explanations of illness, as well as issues related to translation in medical encounters.

Language(s) and Explanations of Illness

Connections between language varieties and explanations of illness remain under-examined. Individuals' culturally patterned ways of explaining illness are linked to multilingualism or the use of multiple registers, genres, or dialects in quite complex ways. Medical pluralism is a term sometimes used to describe the complex, often overlapping multiple explanations of illness that many patients bring to medical encounters. It is important to note that even in middle-class US contexts, patients' use of scientific medical explanatory frameworks is often contextually or situationally specific, and individuals sometimes

draw from other explanations of illness (eg, religious, “new-age”). The role of language in medical pluralism is complex. On the one hand, a particular language, dialect, or register might be connected to particular explanatory frameworks of illness (eg, English is often associated with scientific medicine). On the other hand, a shared language might mask the co-existence of multiple explanations of illness. A third possibility is that the use of multiple languages or registers might not clearly map on to multiple cultural and scientific models of illness. An initial recommendation to medical practitioners is simply that they should be aware of these complexities.

In addition, narratives about epidemiology may reinforce the marginalization of particular groups (often, groups in which devalued language varieties are spoken). Popular media sources sometimes draw from narratives about disease epidemiology that are broader in scope than evidence allows. Narratives that individualize illness and link it to individual behaviors obscure links to inequalities that are historically grounded and correlated with linguistic difference. It is crucial to recognize that illness and inequality are highly correlated. Socioeconomic and historical contexts shape marginalization, which impacts epidemiology, which in turn reinforces marginalization in a feedback loop. From a linguistic standpoint, engaging with anthropological approaches to illness and inequality includes examining marginalized peoples’ narratives about epidemiology (rather than dismissing them as ignorant or superstitious) and considering the ways that these narratives respond to and are shaped by global economic and political forces.

Translation in Medical Encounters

Engaging with illness and inequality also means attending to problems of translation involving speakers of different languages, dialects and registers. Even among speakers of the same language from different cultural or class backgrounds, conventions and values about how information is organized can derail an appointment. The term crosstalk describes this sort of talk at cross-purposes among speakers who share a language in common but have different cultural models for how a particular activity should unfold. Miscommunication can thus occur in ways that may seem unrelated to treatment but can alter its course.

Public health efforts directed towards translation often focus on “language concordance” and attempt to match “limited English proficiency” patients with physicians that speak patients’ primary languages. There, translation may be (incorrectly) understood as a simple process of matching English words and phrases with equivalent ones in the patient’s language. Scientific medicine is replete with terms, concepts, and even sentence structures that are unique to the medical field. Socioeconomic status and education level impact access to this medical register in English and in other languages. Language ideologies—attitudes and feelings about language and communication, whether articulated or implicit in language use—may impact the outcome of medical encounters. In addition, different language varieties (including American Sign Language and dialects of American English) have distinct syntax and norms of language use, causing miscommunication at unexpected moments. Interpreters must make complicated decisions about how to best represent a

physician’s talk in real time, and thus have a great deal of (sometimes unrecognized) power in mediating medical encounters.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SMA contributing editors Mark Peterson (petersm2@muohio.edu) or Bonnie Urciuoli (burciuol@hamilton.edu).

Society for Medical Anthropology

KATHLEEN RAGSDALE, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Mentoring Series*: Working in the Contract Sector

By Jon Poehlman (RTI International)

When considering employment opportunities, I venture that most medical anthropology students have been exposed to job possibilities in academic settings. Less obvious are the array of positions that medical anthropologists occupy in federal, private and non-profit organizations (NPOs) that allow one to continue interests in issues of health, healing, and systems of care. In this inaugural column of the SMA Mentoring Series, it would be too ambitious to address the full range of non-academic employment opportunities for medical anthropologists. However, I can share my experiences as a medical anthropologist conducting contract research for clients in the federal government. In addition, I will offer what I see as some of the skills and experiences that employers in this field look for when recruiting.



Jon Poehlman

US Government agencies such as the AHRQ, CDC, FDA, NIH, SAMHSA, USAID and USDA often use contract agreements to acquire research services to meet their programmatic needs. These services can range from basic data collection activities to fully designed and executed studies and can be funded through different types of contracts ranging from general solicitations that are open to anyone, to larger master task orders agreements that limit bidders to just a few pre-qualified firms.

Abt Associates, American Institutes for Research, Battelle, FHI 360, IFC Macro, RAND Corporation, RTI International, and Westat are just a few of the private companies and NPOs that, through contracts, conduct extensive research on health and social welfare, both in the US and internationally.

These organizations are multidisciplinary in nature and can respond quickly to a broad range of requests for research. As a researcher working on contracts, this means collaborating frequently with individuals with different academic backgrounds and methodological orientations. It helps if you are a bit of a generalist, as projects topics and types of research activities often

vary. It is common for individuals working on contracts to work on two or three projects at a time, as well as spend time responding to new funding opportunities. In terms of publishing, almost all projects culminate in a final report and results are often further disseminated through peer-reviewed publications developed in conjunction with the client.

So what are the perks and challenges in this type of work?

In terms of perks, contract research provides opportunities to work on diverse research projects. Moreover, it is rewarding to know that results of your research are going to have immediate relevance. The pay is also competitive. What are some the challenges? You are not always the one setting the research agenda and aspects of how the research will be conducted are sometimes dictated to you. And as a medical anthropologist, you may have to accept that many of your “taken for granted notions” about the role and importance of culture to health may not be shared by all your clients or co-workers.

So, what do organizations engaged in contract research look for in potential employees? While it helps to bring content expertise in areas that align with agency activities (eg, HIV, health disparities, community engagement, program evaluation), perhaps more important is possessing a core set of research skills that can be applied across a range of project topics. Be specific about your skills and be ready to talk about them, as simply saying you have “qualitative research skills” or “multi-methods skills” may not land you the job. In your CV or resume, it is a plus to emphasize your practical experience. If you are listing previous experiences, highlight your role and describe the types of research activities you are proud you completed.

In job hunting, while most companies post jobs on their websites, it is always better to connect directly with someone within an organization. Keep a file of contacts and use your professional networks formed in graduate school, during research projects and internships, and with fellow colleagues to connect online and through personal contacts—including the SMA website. Good luck.

**Contributing Editor’s Note: This article marks the launch of the SMA “Mentoring Series” occasional column. To submit contributions to the “Mentoring Series” or “Notes from the Field” contact SMA Contributing Editor Kathleen Ragsdale (kathleen.ragsdale@ssrc.msstate.edu).*

Society for Urban, National and Transnational/Global Anthropology

SUSAN FALLS, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Sense of the City

Presentations in the 2012 AAA program like “Earthy Pleasures: Sensory Experiences in Urban Gardens” (Adrienne Bryant, Indiana U), “Technology, Sound, Sensation: Disorienting Noise and Electricity In Tokyo” (Lorraine Plourde, SUNY Purchase), and “Breathing Room: Urban Yoga Studios As Crucible of Social