

es a yearly conference that often includes Latin America specialists.

I welcome short articles and comments that could be of interest to our readers. Please contact me at: Facultad de Antropología, U Autónoma de Yucatán, Calle 76 #455-LL, Merida, Yucatan, Mexico; tel and fax [52]999/925-4523; gvargas@webtelmex.net.mx or gabriela_vargas_cetina@hotmail.com.

Society for Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists

BARB WEST, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

As I write this, I am still thinking about last night's episode of *ER*. This show has not been as open as the original *Ellen* or *Will and Grace* about dealing with LGBTQ issues, but it also has not avoided them. What I'm wondering is whether we would be better off without the kind of visibility that this high-profile series has provided.

During the past seven years, we've seen the abused partner in a gay male relationship go home with his abuser rather than seek help. An HIV-negative male partner of an HIV-positive man was disappointed when an HIV test failed to come up positive. A teen-aged boy preferred to suffer in silence about his depression rather than come out to his father. More recently, one of the main characters, Kerry Weaver, has had relationships with two terribly intolerant caricatures of lesbians. To the best of my memory, there has been only one semi-positive LGBTQ story line: a lesbian relationship was presented as nurturing, caring and very long-term. Unfortunately, this episode ended with Weaver denying one of the elderly women the right to make health-care decisions for her partner when an estranged nephew showed up to block the partner's decision. So much for a positive image.

Last night, the show presented a less-than-flattering image of both a man and a woman. In one story, a black male hip-hop star learned he was HIV-positive (or Hi-Five) but refused to tell his girlfriend, because he would have to own up to being on the Down Low (or DL). While this episode probably brought this cultural phenomenon to light for many people outside the African American and LGBTQ communities, it did not do so in a way that would contextualize and historicize the behavior. Instead, *ER* contributed to the recent media buzz on DL culture, which has "delivered [a] potent cocktail of stories that mix homophobia, hip-hop and HIV/AIDS," as reported by Steven G Fullwood in "The Low Down on Down Low Culture" (*Africana.com*, July 12, 2001). Fullwood's article on this media buzz should have been recommended reading for the *ER* writers. Rather than demonizing DL behavior by linking it to HIV, they could have addressed what Fullwood called the "black community's longstanding ambiguity concerning their men-folk and adulterous behaviors. For centuries, many men have led double lives, one as a faithful husband, and the other as a[n] unconfined, free-wheeling bachelor. Before it even had a

name, black folks condoned DL culture." The episode also could have addressed the homophobia and intolerance that drives many men to seek a double life. As Fullwood again wrote, "Homo hate is everywhere: at the office, on the train, on the street, in my building, in stores, at church, on television, in books, films and music." Yes, deception, especially about HIV, isn't to be condoned. But at the same time, can anybody really blame these men for not stepping forward to claim an identity that's been depicted in such a negative light? Rather than reiterating the same old trope of the dangerous black man, *ER* had the opportunity to be really innovative. It failed.

Last night it failed with a second storyline as well. In this one, Weaver is outed at work by her second girlfriend, who (like her first) has dumped her after two or three dates because she was not already out at work. Perhaps having bought into the stereotype of the dangerous black male, the show was eager to disavow a second stereotype: the lesbians who move in together after two dates. However, this disavowal should not have come at the expense of any sense of compassion and tolerance on the part of the Latina girlfriend, nor at the expense of reality.

My concern with *ER* is that it has used its tremendous popularity to address many difficult issues, all within the framework of entertainment. Why, when it comes to LGB issues (they have yet to have a transgendered character, to the best of my memory), do they reinscribe stereotypes and negativity? Certainly I do not want to go back to the days when there were no LGBTQ characters on popular TV shows, but I'm not certain that this kind of visibility is any better.

Send contributions to Barb West at bwest@uop.edu.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

JAMES STANLAW AND MARK PETERSON,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

A Letter on Sept 11

[We have not talked much about Sept 11, or its linguistic importance, in this column as yet. Prof "X," however, has submitted this letter, telling of the tragedy's impact on her graduate seminar last semester. This letter might be construed as being controversial, but it is *not* meant to reflect the views of the SLA Board or membership, the AAA or even myself. In fact, in the longer version, Prof X said she did not write this letter to be anti-American or even necessarily political. She just thought it was important that some linguistic discussion about Sept 11 be started, and wanted to hear the views of others. It is in this light that I present it, and welcome comments.—Ed.]

I was driving to class when I heard about "it" on the car radio. Our seminar on language rights and linguistic minorities met once a week on Tuesday afternoons. The day of the attacks on the World Trade Center, the Muslim students in the seminar

were completely silent, even though I didn't think the environment was particularly hostile. A few weeks later, however, on another Tuesday, the US attacks on Afghanistan began. I walked into class to find a beehive of sounds and discussions; it didn't look like a day to start off talking about Labov and language use in department stores. As surprising as was their silence on Sept 11, today the Arab students were vocal, excited, even loud. Though no one in the class seemed to be disagreeing with them, I was surprised at the intensity and depth of their anger, even though none of the Muslim students were Afghan or Pakistani.

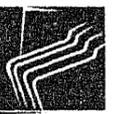
A few weeks later I walked in and heard, "Don't you see, he could not have written this letter! It is preposterous." The previous week the US government released what supposedly was the last, five-page letter of Mohamed Atta, who allegedly masterminded the attacks and piloted one of the planes into one of the WTC towers. Ali and Yasser were explaining that the Arabic in the letter was so bizarre. "No one would ever say such a thing," Ali said, referring to the reference to Atta's family in the prayer in the letter. "Where is the mention of the Prophet?" With their help, we went through several paragraphs dissecting the letter stylistically and sociolinguistically.

If there was one single thing that the class got from our discussions, it was how news in the Arabic media differs from the mainstream American media. We spent much time hearing our Muslim students describe what was being said on Al Jazeera and other Arabic-language news sources. I was glad again to have native Arabic speakers in class when the supposedly self-incriminating video of Osama bin Laden was released. Though it was hard to find the complete text in the American media, we were able to get it on the Internet. When compared to the excerpted translations given on CNN or ABC News, the story we saw was more nuanced. Though the Arabic was said to be confident and strong, our students stressed how metaphorical and idiosyncratic the language was.

After some 15 such weeks, the class ended. With the events of the past semester and the several group projects we worked on, we had all become quite close. As the last hour came to a close, I asked if anyone had any final parting thoughts. After a little hesitation, Fatima said, "I know we talked about diglossia and Arabic things many times. I just wanted to say that Arabic is special. It is beautiful. It is the true language of the Qur'ân, the words of God passed on to the Prophet." With animation, she went on. "You can look at all the other languages of the world . . . no other language has the same complexity of structure, the same depth of thought . . . the grammar of all the other world's languages are contained within it. . . ."

"Wait," said Pyong, a Korean student. "Don't you believe in linguistic relativity? Aren't there no superior or inferior languages?"

There was a long moment of silence. I decided to sum things up. "Well, of course, I don't really think that is what Fatima literally means, but,



remember, we discussed at great length about the power of symbols and how the utterance of a single word can change the world." I thought this was a good place to adjourn for winter vacation.

I knew that Fatima knew all about linguistic relativism, as we read Boas and Sapir at the beginning of the semester, and she wrote a nice midterm exam paper on French in Morocco discussing just these issues. However, the emotional, the cultural and the religious can at times override what appears on a midterm. It was enlightening for me to see how the magic of a language can take hold in the heart of a person. Or take hold in the hearts of a people.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to SLA Contributing Editors Jim Stanlaw (stanlaw@ilstu.edu) or Mark Peterson (peterson@aucegypt.edu).

Society for Medical Anthropology

ANN MILES, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Your SMA Website

By Craig Janes (U of Colorado-Denver)

Typically, websites have two functions. First, they are repositories of information; in this case, about an organization—its history, structure, purpose, links to other sources of information and so on. Second, websites offer a vehicle for rapid information exchange. During the past several years, and primarily because of the efforts of our first webmaster, Ruthbeth Finerman, the SMA website fulfills the first function reasonably well. Until recently, we have been less concerned with the potential information exchange capabilities of our website, so this potential remains largely unexploited. My purpose here is to describe our website for those who have not yet browsed its pages (or have browsed them incompletely), to discuss some recent changes to the website that are intended to enhance its utility as a tool to facilitate the rapid exchange of information, and to encourage you to use the website as a communication tool.

In terms of its function as a repository of information, Ruthbeth Finerman and I have tried to create a reasonably complete record of past and present SMA business. The website, for example, contains a complete record of all news columns published in *AN* from Jan 1996 to the present. In addition to the news columns, the website provides descriptions of, and links to, active SMA interest groups; lists the Society by-laws and current officers; describes (and in many cases provides links to) 27 training programs in medical anthropology, and currently is the sole "official" site for *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*. Our new *MAQ* page provides issue contents and abstracts for the past three years, complete information for contributors and a link to the editorial office.

During the past year, I have tried to enhance the utility of the website as a vehicle for the rapid

exchange of information. I have created two pages featuring "current" or "breaking" news. In addition to the current news column page, an announcements page has been added. The announcements provide a space for the posting of time-sensitive announcements, as well as requests for information or assistance. Entries are indexed at the beginning of the page. At present, the single page provides adequate space for the relatively few items received for posting. If volume increases, electronic discussion or listserv options might need to be explored. In the meantime, I invite you to submit your calls for papers, position announcements or requests. My hope is that the website will become the first place people go to solicit participation in a planned symposium, place a call for papers, describe new books and journals, and announce promising new research initiatives.

As websites grow and become more complex, it becomes increasingly difficult for a single webmaster, who has only a few minutes a week to devote to maintaining a site, to monitor completely the accuracy and timeliness of information and links. As you browse the website and find things that need to be corrected, changed or updated, please send me an email at craig.janes@cudenver.edu. Please visit the website at www.cudenver.edu/public/sma.

Business Meeting and Awards Report

The Annual Business Meeting for the SMA was held on Nov 30 during the 2001 AAA Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Once the cash bar was fully operational, SMA President Bill Dressler called the meeting to order. Bill's very personal opening remarks honored the contributions of Arthur Rubel to teaching and research in medical anthropology. Among the many committee reports was the presentation of SMA Awards. Virginia Dominguez presented the Eileen Basker Memorial Prize to Susan Martha Kahn for *Reproducing Jews: A Cultural Account of Assisted Reproduction in Israel*. James Trostle then announced the Steven Polgar Paper Prize winner as Arushi Sinha for her article "An Overview of Telemedicine, the Virtual Gaze of Health Care in the Next Century" (*MAQ*, Sept 2000). The Charles Hughes Graduate Student Paper Prize was awarded to Elizabeth Horton (U of Arizona) for "Stories of Aging, Ideology and Nation"; and the W H Rivers Undergraduate Student Paper Prize was presented to a most grateful Sunita Puri (Yale U) for her paper "Immigration, Isolation and (Community) Identity."

Suzanne Heurtin-Roberts, representing the Program Committee, reported that the SMA did very well in having sessions accepted to the final program, and she had some advice for 2002 contributors. Suzanne suggested members seek joint sponsorship of sessions, thus allowing the SMA to have more sessions in total; she encouraged members to consider Poster Sessions; and she noted that abstracts for the 2002 AAA Annual Meeting are due Mar 31 (not Apr 1, as is customary). There will be online submissions.

In one of his last acts as president, and demonstrating heretofore unknown rhythmic sensibilities, Bill played a haunting wineglass accompaniment to Bryan Page's brilliant musical tribute to outgoing Board members. The meeting adjourned with the passing of the gavel. Bill Dressler was hailed by one and all for his tireless service as SMA president, and Mark Nichter was welcomed just as heartily as our newest president.

For more information on the meeting, see www.cudenver.edu/public/sma. To submit to this column, contact Ann Miles at miles@wmich.edu.

Society for Psychological Anthropology

KEVIN BIRTH, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Reflections on the Boyer Prize

By T M Luhrmann (U of Chicago)

[T M Luhrmann won the 2001 Boyer Prize for her book *Of Two Minds: The Growing Disorder in American Psychiatry*. She also is the author of *The Good Parsi* and *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft*.—Ed.]

Of Two Minds is an ethnography of contemporary psychiatric practice and the consequences of that practice for the care of mental illness. In my fieldwork, I found that this was a world in which patients came to be imagined through two approaches so different that they were like different cultures. One of these derived from psychoanalysis, which had dominated American psychiatry after the war and still remained the dominant paradigm for psychotherapy. Here, illness was the result of maladaptive patterns of behavior. The other approach grew out of a biomedical psychiatric science, which emerged as a powerful paradigm in the 1970s and now dominates psychiatric thinking. Here, illness is a medical disease like any other.

For the most part, psychiatrists believed that mental illness was a complex biopsychosocial phenomenon, and that the best treatment for it was a combination of biomedical and psychodynamic interventions, both drugs and talk. But the actual training was more dualistic than integrated. Lecture topics, treatment wards, patients and experts often were defined as either about psychotherapy or about diagnosis and psychopharmacology; and young doctors had to become competent at two very different kinds of tasks. As I spent time in psychiatric training programs, I realized that these different tasks shaped the experience of empathy quite differently.

To be empathic, I argued, a subject must have a concept of who the other person is; an emotional expectation of how that other person will behave; an emotional expectation of how he himself or she herself should behave; and a concept of who he or she would like to become in