

interests intent on maintaining the status quo. In Porto Alegre the object was not to hammer out a common political platform that encapsulated or obliterated the diversity of participants. Instead, the WSF was open to all those interested in sharing experiences, building solidarity, thinking through alternatives and debating strategy for achieving common goals. Afternoons were devoted to over 400 different workshops covering an amazing gamut of themes (see www.forumsocialmundial.org.br).

Why were anthropologists virtually absent, although other disciplines such as sociology, geography, economics and even psychology were highly visible? Fredrik Barth (1994) seems to have part of the answer: "Anthropology has had pitifully little to say on the phenomenon of untranscendable poverty as it affects increasing hundreds of millions of people in all major cities of the world. We have not been able to articulate a position, or even a noticeable interest, in the fact that human activity seems to be destroying humanity's own global habitat." At the risk of offending some of my colleagues, I also think that, while anthropologists have militantly asserted the importance of the local, we are less successful in putting locally-based observations into a context in which approximately 80% of the planet's energy and material resources are at the disposal of only 20% of its inhabitants and in which 12 days worth of global military spending could provide for every child lacking education, housing or health services. Consequently, we appear to have little to say to groups confronting systems of power. As a discipline we can only gain by a confrontation between anthropological ideas and those expressed at the WSF. Ultimately, the mettle of anthropology depends more on this encounter than in winning World Bank consultancies or scoring seminar room debating points.

I propose the SLAA seek out partners among associations of Latin American anthropologists to coordinate sponsorship of at least one workshop and participation in the next meeting of the WSF, to be held January 2002 again in Porto Alegre. Together we can help sustain the hope many delegates felt on their way home from Porto Alegre that, if the groups brought together continue to organize and grow, another world is indeed possible.

Foundation for the Advancement of Mesoamerican Studies, Inc.

FAMSI (www.famsi.org) was formed in 1993 to foster broader understanding of ancient Mesoamerican cultures. Grants are intended to provide assistance for scholarly investigations of ancient cultures of Mesoamerica (Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador). Applicants may be working in such fields as Anthropology, Archaeology, Art History, Epigraphy, Ethnohistory, History and Linguistics. Applications must be received by September 30. For more information, please contact: FAMSI, 268 South Suncoast Boulevard, Crystal River, FL 34429-5498; fax 352/795-1970, famsi@famsi.org.

Please send brief contributions of no more than 670 words to santosf@tivoli.si.edu.

Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists

BARBARA WEST, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

A recent exchange on the SOLGA listserv concerned with gender parity, which followed closely on the heels of African-American history month, has prompted me to write about the politics of privilege. I begin with gender, since that's where my own research and interests lie, but I want to make it clear that I am concerned with privilege generally.

Recognizing a process, an institution or an individual as gendered requires us to focus on some symbols and power relations and ignore others. With regard to individuals, markers for race, class, ethnicity, age, physical and mental ability and even sexual orientation get swept under the carpet to make room for the distinction between woman and man, feminine and masculine. Perhaps in some contexts this makes sense. However, in most situations, gender is just one of many labels we display, one of many categories we inhabit, one of many sets of power relations we have to negotiate throughout the day. If we really want to understand the world in which we live and make changes in it, gender (and race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, age and ability) cannot stand alone in our analyses.

Of course, in our academic lives, most of us are fully cognizant of the intersections of at least some of these multiple hierarchical systems. We teach this to our students and it appears in our writing, to greater or lesser degrees depending on our topics of study. But how much are we prepared the change the way we act and speak in the real world to recognize and change these intersecting power and privilege systems?

This question brings to mind Peggy McIntosh's critical essay, "White Privilege and Male Privilege" (in *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*, 3rd ed, Margaret L Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, eds, 1998). In it, McIntosh argues that while many Euro-Americans and men are able to admit that others may experience discrimination because of their skin color and sex, very few are willing to say that they are being unfairly over-privileged because of their own. Similarly, in discourse and political action where gender is highlighted above all other kinds of differences (or race, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, ability or some other marker), other kinds of representative systems, other kinds of inequalities, other kinds of privileges get ignored.

When we highlight gender, the critical differences between African-American, Asian-American, Native-American, Euro-American and other people's experiences get erased. Similarly, when we bring race to the forefront, transgendered, bisexual, lesbian and gay people's experiences disappear. If we are thoughtful enough to explore the intersection of gender, race and sexuality in a particular context, we lose the perspective of those who are deaf, blind or otherwise differently abled. And what about class? Discussions on class in the US often include segments on race

and sex, but rarely on other kinds of privileges that affect people's lives just as deeply. Discussions on ethnicity and age likewise often invoke just one or two other categories of privilege.



What it comes down to is that privilege is not an either-or proposition. As a way to address this problem and make changes in our society, I propose we explore Kate Bornstein's analysis of gender in *My Gender Workbook*, 1998. She argues that our gender system has created a pyramid of privilege, in which a very few individuals inhabit a position of multiple advantage due to their gender, sex, race, age, class, ethnicity, ability and so on. And then there are the rest of us, who spend our lives fighting with each other over the right to get as close to this powerful pinnacle as its members will allow. I fear that by ignoring all these other categories, the politics of gender (and of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability and age) are merely trying to add a few new members to the top of the pyramid (an impossible goal anyway), rather than dismantling its hold on our minds, bodies and societies. Real change requires we recognize that most of us are both disadvantaged and at least somewhat advantaged by this system of privilege and work to eliminate it entirely, rather than addressing solely sexism, or racism, or heterosexism, or ageism or classism.

Please send your comments, new column ideas, or other information to Barb West at bwest@uop.edu. To sign up for the SOLGA listserv, send a message to listserv@american.edu with "subscribe solga-l" in the body of the message.

Society for Linguistic Anthropology

RICHARD SENGHAS AND JAMES STANLAW,
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

This month we are pleased to present excerpts from an interview with Jane Hill. More of this interview is found in the Knowledge Exchange column in this issue. Here I asked her about her experiences editing a major sociolinguistics journal and her thoughts on the direction linguistic anthropology should take in the near future:

Jim Stanlaw: Where are you interested in taking the journal *Language in Society*?

Jane Hill: I would like people to think of *Language in Society* as a place to put anthropological papers. But it is difficult, because we publish a lot of conversation analysis and that kind of thing, which is actually interesting—but that's not really my thing. And I of course sometimes wish that some of those papers did portray more cultural awareness, some reflexivity about method . . . that I see is very valuable in linguistic anthropology. But I think *Language in Society* at the moment has got to reflect this sort of real diversity, socially and culturally, of approaches. I would really like to get more submissions from anthropologists. The vast majority of submissions come from people in communications and sociology.

JS: Well, we'll put the word out.

JH: Yeah, we're here, we're ready, we're eager. Papers from anthropologists will be read with great sympathy. And they will get a lot of editorial attention because I feel competent to help out anthropologists.

JS: Well, I guess I'll ask a philosophical question. Where would you like linguistic anthropology to go in the coming years?

JH: I would like to see linguistic anthropology be more conscious of its applied possibilities. I think that that's important. And we have some real potential there. First of all, because I think we are much more self-conscious about methodology than cultural anthropologists are. We really do have kind of a tool kit. And we need to get those kinds of methods—which include some very classic ethnographic methods [like] lexical analysis—we need to get those recognized as really useful things to know for people who are going into applied work. In fact, the work on language death is one of the areas where I think we really are . . . already involved in a lot of applied stuff. I think we need to turn to people that you might not immediately think of as linguistic anthropologists but who have certainly been influential—people like Charlotte Linde, for instance—and think about what we can do out in the applied arena.

I was greatly distressed, because several years ago the AAA made this film about career opportunities in practicing anthropology. And linguistic anthropology was hardly visible. They had a truly boring static little episode where they looked at somebody using a computer at the Center for Applied Linguistics. The film had other kinds of anthropologists doing other kinds of cool and exciting things. So that is something that I think we could really pay attention to.

And I think that careful attention to method and careful attention to ethical considerations is going to be important. In our department we are just going nuts with the new human subjects regulations [see March 2001 AN, pp 23–24 and April 2001 AN, pp 9–19 —Ed.] . . . But the good thing about this is that it has really focused us on ethical issues. For a long time I think we have just sort of taken the position, that, well, you know, we don't stick pins in anybody or anything like that, and we're not going to be doing anybody any harm. But, in fact, if you work with indigenous people [and indigenous languages] . . . you know that it is really easy to cause harm. I mean, not the kind of harm that institutional review boards generally think about, but you can inadvertently do political things. . . .

But I do see the close attention to language at the heart of anthropology. And I think it is really important, and we need to keep doing good work so that people will see that.

More of this interview can be found in the Knowledge Exchange section of this issue. The complete text can be found under "Anthropology News" at <http://lilt.ilstu.edu.soa>.

Please send your comments, contributions, news and announcements to Richard Senghas (richard.senghas@sonoma.edu) or Jim Stanlaw (stanlaw@ilstu.edu).

Society for Medical Anthropology

ANN MILES AND FRED BLOOM, CO-CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Is African Indigenous Therapy is Equivalent to Biomedical Therapy?

By Edward C Green (Independent)

Carl Kendall's review of my book, *Indigenous Theories of Contagious Disease* (1999, Altamira Press) in *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* (14[4]: 628-30) contains some mischaracterizations that need to be cleared up. The basic thesis of my book is that indigenous understandings of the contagious disease process in Africa tend not to be magico-religious in character but naturalistic and related to empirical observation. Moreover, these naturalistic etiologic notions *tend* to relate to behaviors that limit rather than spread contagious disease. I express the hope that international health programs will recognize this and thereafter be less inclined to dismiss African health beliefs as dysfunctional and dangerous, prior to empirical investigation.

Kendall's most egregious mischaracterization is:

Among the false syllogisms here is the idea that if indigenous contagion theory is equivalent to germ theory, then indigenous therapy is equivalent to biomedical therapy. I don't think I buy that, nor do most Africans (2000:630)

Well, neither do I! The trouble is, I did not write nor imply what this reviewer attributes to me. I only suggest that indigenous contagion theory as a *belief* system shares a number of fundamental similarities with biomedical contagion theory, broadly speaking, although not necessarily with germ theory *per se*. For example, both are naturalistic and related to empirical observation. But I never say or imply that "indigenous therapy is equivalent to biomedical therapy." This attribution of course makes me look like a naïve New Age romantic.

The closest thing I can think of that Kendall could have found in my book to make the statement quoted above is my caution that we need far more research on all aspects of indigenous medicine before we have a right to dismiss or reject it (Green 1999:268). True, I give the example of some herbs that have purgative effects (raising the danger of dehydration) yet have been recently shown to be effective pharmacologically against a range of diarrhea-causing pathogens. This of course is not saying that "indigenous therapy is equivalent to biomedical therapy," that we should banish antibiotics and hospitals from Africa, or any other such nonsense. In fact, I write that among the aims of African-biomedical collaboration should be "discouraging use of unclean (unsterilized) razors for any type of treatment" by indigenous healers and promoting "referrals to hospitals and clinics when biomedical treatment is proven superior to indigenous therapy" (Green 1999:267).

Kendall ignores numerous, important qualifying statements in the book and represents my argument as one-sided, monolithic, in fact crude and extremist. For example, he tells the MAQ reader that I say of naturalist health beliefs, ". . . they predict appropriate health care behavior (and there is no consequent health problem) . . ." (Kendall 2000:630).

What I in fact say is that indigenous *contagion* beliefs *tend* to be naturalistic in character (but not always so) and to lead to rational behavior (defined as those behaviors that tend to limit rather than increase contagion), at least more so than personalistic beliefs, which are more likely to lead to other types of health behavior. I also write:

This is not to say that all African health beliefs and practices are naturalistic, rational, or health-promotive. Some are not by objective, scientific standards, and these are discussed in some detail in chapter 8. (Green 1999:14)

If an MAQ reader reads only Kendall's review and not my book, s/he of course will agree more with balanced views expressed by the reviewer than with the fanatical sounding viewpoint attributed to the book's author. I myself would agree with the reviewer. But he is setting up a straw man.

Regarding the role of Western biomedicine in Africa, I agree with the late King Sobhuza II of Swaziland (a voracious reader of anthropology journals) who argued that Africa needs a system that combines the best of both Western and African medical traditions.

2001 Basker Prize Competition

The Eileen Basker Memorial Prize recognizes excellence in research on gender and health. It is awarded annually by the SMA. For more information, see the Awards Alert section of the Career Development column in this issue of AN.

See www.cudenver.edu/public/sma for an expanded column. To submit, contact Ann Miles, Anthropology, WMU, Kalamazoo, MI 49008; 616/387-3983, fax 616/387-3999, Miles@wmich.edu.

Society for Psychological Anthropology

KEVIN BIRTH, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

SPA Web Site

The SPA web site has been updated and moved to www.aaanet.org/spa/index.htm. The site contains information on meetings, officers, bylaws and publications of the society. Stephen Leavitt (Union C) is maintaining this site. His e-mail address is leavitts@union.edu.

Graduate Program Information on the Web

Our website will include information on graduate programs that offer training in psychological anthropology. If you have information on a gradu-