



AAA 2013: The Final Countdown!

written by Allegra
November, 2013



Only 14 days left before the AAA meeting in Chicago! As the largest conference within our discipline, the AAA triggers both enthusiasm at the perspective of meeting anthropologists from all over the world and, perhaps, for having the opportunity to showcase one's work, but also a feeling of unease toward colleagues who were not lucky enough to have an institution pay for this outrageously expensive event. It is quite ironic that anthropologists, many of whom are at the forefront of the battle against the [privatization of the academia](#), end up organising their annual meeting in one of the most expensive cities of the world: Chicago (and with an extravagant hotel to match)!



For many ‘academic nomads’ like us, the AAA is a thrill, but it can be also highly depressing affair, involving thousands of participants and hundreds of desperate job seekers nervously waiting to be interviewed in hotel rooms. This testimony of [Sarah Kendzior in Al-Jazeera](#) is a powerful reminder of the exclusionary dynamics of academic conferences whereby those who are on the precarious side of the ‘knowledge industry’ (adjuncts, PhD students etc.) and cannot afford the luxury AAA meetings have become, have to invest an incredible amount of money in the hope of finding a way out.



The investment we make as young academics to be ‘out there’ is another proof of our neoliberal predicament. As Rosalind Gill’s argues[\[1\]](#):

“Being hard-working, self-motivating, and enterprising subjects is what constitutes academics as so perfectly emblematic of this neoliberal moment, but is also part of a psychic landscape in which not being successful (or lucky!) is misrecognized – or to put it more neutrally, made knowable – in terms of individual (moral) failure”

We write this not just as a way of lamenting over the precarious conditions under which (young) academics have to work, but rather because our enthusiasm for the AAA also comes with a few ‘hidden injuries’, to use the words of Rosalind Gill again, that some of you, [dear readers](#), may not be aware of.

But enthusiasm, there is nevertheless!

As we pack our suitcases full of anxieties and excitement, we start to make plans



in order to make the most out of the five days that we will spend in the Hilton Hotel, hanging out with some of our favourite thinkers. And because everything is so well organised, we discovered that there is even an [AAA application](#) that can be downloaded on one's tablet or iphone. The application is broken in 6 sections: agenda, exhibitors, attendees, information, announcements, My meetings. You can already get in touch with scholars you want to talk to, organise meetings, schedule the panels you want to attend! There are a range of new tools available now to help plan everything, including the [AAA's personal meeting scheduler](#) and of course [Google Calendar](#). Kerim has written a useful blog post on Savage Minds combining these two process into one [#AAA2013 Google Calendar](#).

For legal anthros, some panels sponsored by the [Association for Political and Legal Anthropology](#) stand out as very promising. Here is a list, based on our own interests...but of course, there is much more to discover out there!

Wednesday, November 20, 2013

LIBERAL PUBLICS, ILLIBERAL POLITICS

PDR 3 (Chicago Hilton)

12:00 PM-1:45 PM

Organizers: Nusrat S Chowdhury (Amherst College and Amherst College)

Chairs: Pinky Hota (Smith College)

Discussants: Andrea Karin Muehlebach (University of Toronto)

This panel seeks to engage with the tensions around “the flesh” that inform ethnographic concerns around the political. In doing so, it seeks answers to the following: How do we account for the visceral substance of the imaginations that



both constrain and augment the lives of modern political subjects? Why is it that an increasing prominence of a discourse of rights is coupled with a heightened investment in bypassing law and due process? How do neo-liberal institutions and frameworks condition the possibility of both liberal publicity and its other, illiberal politics? What kinds of affect management are involved in both? How do we bypass a theme of “arrested modernity,” and consider popular politics as enabling of serious intellectual engagement? And crucially, how do these tensions expose the many anxieties that riddle the project of liberalism? Tracking what Eric Santner has called, “the vicissitudes of the flesh,” the papers in this panel explore the many paradoxes that liberal publicity and illiberal politics raise for an anthropological understanding of popular sovereignty. By “illiberal politics” we refer to the seeming preeminence of embodiment and corporeality in mass politics. Modern notions of subjectivity, citizenship, and justice are constantly brushing up against the aesthetics and demands of mass politics that are at the same time harbingers of hope for emerging political collectivities. The nature of such politics stokes liberal unease with violence, irrationality and immediacy. By looking at its form and content ethnographically, the individual papers on the panel are commentaries on the biopolitical pressures of and on popular sovereignty. They further enquire whether the liberal framework has run its course in ensuring a sense of justice and hope for many people around the world. If so, how does culture lay bare these inadequacies of liberalism in shaping contemporary political consciousness? Together, the ethnographic and historical ruminations around tribal politics and injurious speech in India, the confrontational politics of the Red Army in Japan, corruption and popular uprising in Jordan, indigeneity and liberal citizenship in Brazil, and the management of women’s bodies in the human rights discourses in Turkey will speak to both the intransigence and insufficiency of a liberal paradigm in a global political culture that frequently verges on the illiberal. Our aim is not simply to point out certain aporias within liberalism, but to engage with the politics that is borne of the tensions between its universalist claims and the situated demands and desires of everyday life.



TECHNOPOLITICAL FUTURES: TRANSFORMATIONS IN STATES AND EXPERTISE

12:00 PM-3:45 PM

Grand Tradition (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Mark A Gardiner (Stanford University) and Adam E Leeds (University of Pennsylvania)

Chairs: Taylor C Nelms (University of California, Irvine)

Discussants: Gregg Hetherington (Concordia University) and Bill Maurer (UC Irvine)

This session highlights new ways in which state experts and expertise are investigated ethnographically when the definitions and loci of stateness and expertise are themselves in question. “Technocrat” remains for the most part a term of abuse: technocrats have largely been ideological foils to anthropologists’ preferred focus on those subject to and subjectified by technocratic projects. But the ways that rule is patterned by the production and management of knowledge remain of central interest to anthropologists and recent works have increasingly turned to those involved in the production of knowledge as well as the (re)production of power, state institutions, and the state effect. Some of these works have followed a Foucauldian line, examining the co-constitution of objects of knowledge and rationalities of rule (Mitchell, Ferguson, Petryna, Rabinow). Others more influenced by science studies have addressed states and expertise in the co-assembly of the techno-scientific and the social (Latour, Hull, Riles). Such studies have been stimulated by shifts in how knowledge is produced and how states function. What happens to technocrats and technocracy when states see from many vantage points at once—when state authority is diffused across governments, academia, NGOs, and corporations (Trouillot 2001)? Or when



systems of knowledge corresponding to differing disciplinary, national, and political histories are brought together? What do the social, technical, and ethical worlds of experts in these circumstances look like? How are “ethical plateaux” (Fischer 2001) constituted at the intersection of novel technoscience, heterogenous institutions, and moral imaginaries? The papers brought together in this panel address these questions from a variety of empirical and theoretical standpoints, investigating states and expertise in the context of environmental governance, legal systems, energy, fiscal and population management, and other areas. They explore the varied ways in which states and expertise take shape in- and outside of government, corporations, and transnational institutions. They provide substantive accounts of the discursive and material means by which experts work to make populations, nature, and states themselves intelligible, legible, enumerable, and governable and of how expert practices engage political, historical, or natural circumstance. In doing so they open up the black boxes not only of technopolitical practice but also of technocratic forms of life: they deal with governmental regimes, agencements and techniques and how these articulate with the life histories, imagined futures, and ethical attitudes of technocrats themselves.

Friday, November 22, 2013

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PEACEBUILDING AFTER VIOLENT CONFLICT

10:15 AM-12:00 PM

Conference Room 4B (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Susan F Hirsch (George Mason University) and Leslie K Dwyer (George Mason University)

Chairs: Leslie K Dwyer (George Mason University) and Susan F Hirsch (George



Mason University)

Discussants: James G Ellison (Dickinson College)

In the 20-plus years since Starn accused anthropologists of “missing the revolution” by framing violent conflicts as extraordinary events outside of their disciplinary purview, anthropology has hosted increasingly animated conversations on violence, terror, traumatic memory, social suffering and war. At the same time, anthropologists have intensified their efforts to critically address the discursive and logistical supports of violent conflict, from the rhetoric authorizing torture to the participation of anthropologists in the U.S. military’s Human Terrain System. Yet despite this amplified attention to violence and its legitimations and effects, “peace” – as either an analytic construct or as a keyword authorizing a range of interventions, from grassroots trauma healing to drone strikes to criminal prosecutions, has received strikingly scant attention. In this panel, we address “peacebuilding” as an increasingly common response after violent conflict. Peacebuilding activities undertaken by local, national, and international organizations and institutions include (among others) those that focus on acknowledging the conflict itself through, for instance, constructing memorials or initiating dialogues among former enemies and also those that focus on fostering a “culture of peace” as an effort to guard against future conflict. This panel explores an emergent, diverse set of critical perspectives on peace and peacebuilding in post-conflict settings. Probing the conceptual clarity of peace as it has been operationalized in response to conflict these critics ask: What notions of humanity, justice, and non-violence are embedded in the notions of peace at the center of specific peacebuilding initiatives? What practices are routinely assumed to accomplish the goals of fostering peace? How do assumptions about peace and peacebuilding preclude other types of response, especially those that go beyond liberal peacebuilding models? How do globally-circulating models of liberal peacebuilding and transitional justice circulate in dynamic tension with local visions and practices? Critical perspectives on peace and peacebuilding emerge from local reactions to national or international interventions and in other instances from the tensions generated as peacebuilders in diverse institutions



(e.g., development initiatives, conflict resolution and human rights organizations, and police and military forces) interact in sometimes contradictory efforts to promote the elusive and ill-defined goal of peace. Panelists will address issues of peace and peace-building from a diverse range of perspectives and in a wide range of contexts. Bolten examines how Sierra Leoneans promote peaceful elections through election laws condemned as draconian by international observers, but locally embraced because they grant people freedom from coercion and intimidation. Burrell takes the under-theorized concept of waiting as a starting point for critical consideration of peace and peace initiatives in post-war Guatemala. Dwyer's paper addresses the tensions that have emerged in Aceh, Indonesia as liberal peace-building models constrain conflict memories and post-conflict justice claims. Hirsch turns to the recent Kenyan elections to explore the complex and contradictory interconnections of "peace" and "justice" in peacebuilding efforts. Lauren Leve's paper draws on the affective experiences of Nepali Christian women to explore the disjunctures between peacebuilding as imagined by different parties to the process, as well as the unexpected forms that peace may take.

And a bit of self-promotion won't harm anyone!

WHERE ARE VALUES? EXPLORING THE 'GENUINE' WITHIN THE LAW

Friday, November 22, 2013: 1:45 PM-3:30 PM

Joliet Room (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Julie Billaud (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology) and Miia Halme-Tuomisaari (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology)

Chairs: Sally Engle Merry (New York University)



Recent anthropological work on the 'law' has often focused on the formal settings where norms, rules and values are produced and mobilised. Most of this literature has strived to describe the ways in which actors maneuver the plurality of normative orders available in their immediate environment, insisting on "strategies", "tactics" and "calculations" as means to articulate Self-ethical positioning. Whereas this scholarship has diversified structuralist understandings of the law 'as a major instrument of domination', it has simultaneously depicted engaged actors as cynical strategists driven by rational costs/benefits evaluations. This workshop aims to enrich this scholarship by focusing on values. In tapping into both ongoing philosophical discussions on values as well as the emerging anthropology of morality, it traces how values are historically and sociologically conceptualized and what they mean for different actors, how they appear in the world, how they circulate, become visible (or on the contrary, get marginalized) and how they transform social and political discourses, practices and subjectivities. Thus this workshop forms a new entry into recent legal anthropological work on transnational bureaucracies and the influential scholarship on audit cultures by focusing on the 'genuine' (and not so genuine) ways in which actors create and shape their moral universe by actively engaging with values. Further, it seeks to understand how the subjectivities of the engaged actors are shaped and influenced by the various normative forces that inform their systems and modes of action in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. In this workshop we wish to examine these questions through ethnographic accounts of the international human rights regime - understood broadly to incorporate also 'humanitarianism', discussions on 'Corporate Social Responsibility', and legal interventions in post-war/reconstruction or 'democratization' processes.

ASPIRATIONAL STATES

Friday, November 22, 2013: 4:00 PM-5:45 PM



Conference Room 4H (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria (Brandeis University) and Neha Vora (Lafayette College and Lafayette College)

Chairs: Neha Vora (Lafayette College and Lafayette College) and Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria (Brandeis University)

Recent developments in the anthropology of the state have focused on how bureaucratic processes, biopolitical technologies, and on-the-ground enactments of the logics of governance produce differently situated political subjects. This approach moves away from viewing the state as a unified actor enacting top-down strategies of rule. While this line of inquiry sheds light on the multiple and contradictory effects of mundane techniques of governance, this panel builds upon this scholarship in order to emphasize the imaginative and affective aspects within acts of governing as well as in political activism aimed at institutional transformation. Participants in this panel see a wide range of projects—from anti-corruption efforts in India, implementation of “knowledge economy” infrastructure in Qatar, and investment-promotion efforts in Senegal, for instance—less as instances of subject formation than as ordinary enactments of political utopias. By framing these projects in this way, we explore questions such as, how do notions of futurity shape governance visions? How do charismatic universalisms operate on-the-ground in the present, and how can we investigate them ethnographically? And ultimately, how do aspirations towards specific state formations—both from within state institutions and from civil society formations—shape subjectivities as simultaneously political and affective?

Saturday, November 23, 2013

SITUATING TECHNOCRATS: THE POLITICS OF STATE-MAKING

8:00 AM-9:45 AM



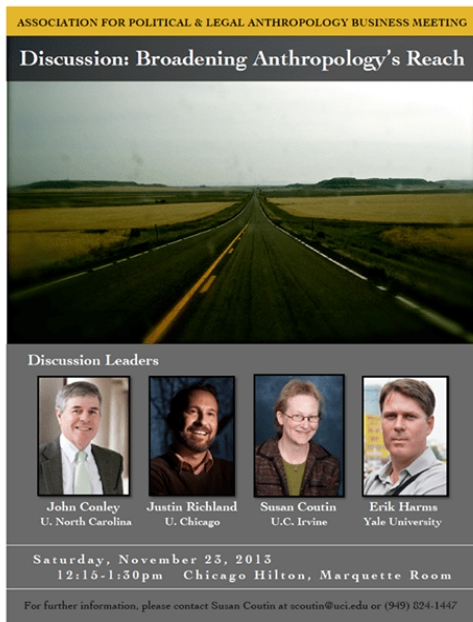
Salon A-3 (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Karen Michele Hoffman (University of Puerto Rico)

Chairs: Maria L Vidart (Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Rice University)

Discussants: Hannah Appel (University of California, Berkeley)

This panel focuses on states, technocrats working in state agencies, and their interlocutors. On the one hand, the panel acknowledges and analyzes how states in part consist of professionals working within reified expertise-based practices, and how their protocols frequently legitimate and privilege particular voices, forms of knowledge and projects, while rendering invisible alternative voices, knowledges, and projects. On the other hand, the works presented here inquire into the multiplicity of activity that also takes place in and constitutes technocratic states. For example, the papers examine how the life experiences and moral economies of technocrats shape their projects. They explore the tensions that run through the practices of technocrats working in states, such as that between a commitment to the public interest (itself variably defined) and the interests of economic and political elites (which themselves may be in conflict), as well as how technocrats manage, resolve, and/or work within these tensions. The works analyze conflicts within the state, and/or between state entities and their interlocutors, as well as the products of this friction. Additionally, the panel discusses technocrats' visions of political relations and the institutions in which they work, their critical insights, and the way that these visions and insights variably open up and close down possibilities for social transformation. Last but not least, the papers discuss the influence on state projects of actors who are located "outside" of the state, which complicates notions of the state as a monolithic category. In these pursuits, the panel describes technocratic state forms in specific historical, social and cultural contexts.



DO NOT MISS: APLA BUSINESS MEETING ON BROADENING ANTHROPOLOGY'S REACH

12:15 PM-1:30 PM

Marquette Room (Chicago Hilton)

With: John Conley (UNC), Justin Richland (UChicago), Susan Coutin (UC-Irvine), and Erik Harms (Yale)

BODYING FORTH IN LAW

Saturday, November 23, 2013: 1:45 PM-3:30 PM

Waldorf Room (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Sameena Mulla (Marquette University and Marquette University) and Sidharthan Maunaguru (University of Edinburgh and National University of Singapore)

Chairs: Kevin G Karpiak (Eastern Michigan University)

Discussants: Veena Das (Johns Hopkins University)

Law courts, disputes and adjudications often produce fractious and dense



utterances through which disputants and their formal agents assert claims using language. Some anthropologists have considered language as “the bodying forth of words,” particularly in relation to expressions of pain and suffering (Das 1997). As pain bodies forth, it initiates a language game that gives words a corporeal weight. Rather than dwelling in a state of inexpressible privacy, or destroying communication, pain “makes a claim asking for acknowledgement, which may be given or denied” (Ibid). This panel considers the implications of the bodying forth of pain in and through the institution of law. Legal institutions frequently enact conventions that treat admissions of pain and suffering as allegations that seek acknowledgement through the processes of adjudication. It is not enough to say one has been harmed. Rather, ostensive forms of demonstration are required to win acknowledgement from judicial authorities. As (potential) adjudicants voice their suffering, it must body forth in the form of affect, corporeal evidence, and, at times, be material “proof.” If such proofs are unfurnished, one can run the risk of being framed as false, incredible, or even branded a liar. These stakes magnify in that disputants may not simply speak for themselves, but for a community, a spiritual group, or a class of sufferers. When participating in such processes, disputants often borrowed from those legal experts who have trained and mastered the conventions and style in which to furnish proofs and perform or demonstrate suffering. The deployment of language at all stages of a dispute is often highly anticipatory in that it imagines what may become necessary for the acknowledgement of pain. The papers gathered here reflect on cases in which legal complaints are attached to intricate modes of voicing, embodying and materializing evidence of harm. Among the issues explored, the panelists here analyze legally binding arbitration as it impacts the reputations and working life of laborers such as artists, writers and actors, exploring the intertwining of voice within creative enterprises and within the law. Panelists also consider how the suffering of and support for religious communities living under conditions of war is called into contention by legal proceedings that cast such support as material aid to terrorism. In other contexts, it is the deeply gendered body that is somaticized and rendered into a legal object that pits body against the voice. The pitting of body against and with voice is especially prevalent within legal



adjudication of sexual violence. Spanning ethnographic settings as varied as South Korea, Guatemala, the U.S. and England, the panelists locate how actors participate in practices of voicing their complaints such that words are made dense and heavy with meaning and credible testimony demonstrates the veracity of suffering.

Sunday, November 24, 2013

CONTESTED POLITICS, DISPUTED CATEGORIES: INSTITUTIONS, EXPERTS, AND EMOTIONS in (POST-)IMPERIAL SETTINGS

12:15 PM-2:00 PM

Boulevard B (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Hakem Al-Rustom (American University in Cairo)

Chairs: Girish Daswani (University of Toronto)

Discussants: Keith S Brown (Brown University) and Pamela L Ballinger (University of Michigan)

Anthropologists of the state have focused their attention on the categorization of populations and national spaces as way of conceptualizing the projects of inclusion/exclusion, assimilation and managing difference, and territorial sovereignty. Building on this work, this panel offers an ontological reformulation of categorization as a process managed by state and non-state actors, rather than an outcome of governance. It does so by shedding the light on negotiations and contestations of population categories that happen in a complex network of relations and institutions at different scales: local, national, and international. Among the questions we seek to address are: • What types of expert knowledge are produced in these networks? • How are these networks perceived and experienced by ordinary people as well as by state and non-state institutions? •



What kind of political subjectivities and emotions do these networks produce? This panel explores these questions through a comparative analysis of categorization as a process in imperial and post-imperial settings where the boundaries of the state and the nation are subject to continuous contestation. The contributors examine the role of experts, diplomats, state and non-state actors, and ordinary people in negotiating identities and belongings through different languages and media. Goff's paper on the Soviet Union explores the erasure of one of the Muslim minority populations through the concerted efforts of disclosure and concealment of knowledge about them. Al-Rustom's paper on Ottoman Armenians looks into the strategic ways in which imperial and Turkish diplomats adopted a language of emotions in negotiating the predicament of Christian Armenians in the Republic of Turkey. Adar's paper on Egypt explores changing perceptions and experiences of co-existence in Alexandria from 1922 till 1967, during the consolidation of a national identity marked as "Eastern," "Arab," and "Muslim." Shapiro's paper on Quebec analyzes the process by which the Canadian province has sought to define itself as a distinct political entity through its parliament via different strategies of affirmation. Finally, Smolenski paper on post-communist Poland explores how the Catholic Church negotiated Poland's entry into the European Union through a Christian hereditary ownership narrative. The panel is thus divided into two broad themes, the first being the politics and practices of erasure (Goff, Al-Rustom, Adar) and the second being the role of institutions in the disputes over categories and belonging (Shapiro, Smolenski). The questions of recognition, identity, independence and sovereignty at the heart of this panel represent both a challenge for scholars in several disciplines and a larger educated lay public. In discussing these issues in a variety of case studies from several continents, the anthropologists and historians assembled here show how the past is invoked in multiple ways both to legitimize old and new claims and to challenge nationalist and imperial historiographies. In keeping with the AAA theme, these papers offer critical interdisciplinary insights into the ways in which the past and future are intertwined in the present. This interconnectedness derives from the fact that negotiations over categories are also negotiations over perceptions which structure the relationality of social life.



[1] Gill, R (2009) Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia in Flood,R. & Gill,R. (Eds.) Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections. London: Routledge