

SESSION 1

DYNAMIC UNION? THE CHALLENGES OF ANTHROPOLOGY
MIGRATING ACROSS THE DISCIPLINARY DIVIDE

PAPER ABSTRACTS

Of Sciences and Men. Approaching an environmental problem through chemistry, law and anthropology

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Now, researchers are encouraged by their institutions to have an interdisciplinary approach. In fact, such an approach asks the question of what researchers are willing to risk. In this paper, we will analyse an interdisciplinary research whose main objective is to develop a close collaboration for a better understanding of a phenomena that is generally studied separately by disciplines that usually do not communicate with each other.

Our research is dealing with how chemical substances are categorized by REACH (Registration Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals). With this new European regulation industrials must give proof of the innocuousness of the substances they want to commercialize. This research brings together three researchers in anthropology, chemistry and law. For the anthropologist, the question is to understand how the actors make this regulation their own. For the chemistry researcher, it consists in asking what is the scientific and regulatory relevance for the characterisation of complex chemical mixtures by using methods developed for single compound recognition. For the law researcher the objective is to check that the actors are in compliance with the law.

This experience shows that interdisciplinarity means more than just combining three different questions and disciplines. For the anthropologist, it requires to return on basics and essentials of the discipline considering that the actors of the chemical industry are professionals, with specific strategies and constraints. To really contribute to the understanding of new things about complex worlds, we also have to be able to shift position and to accept the uncertainty of our points of view, while always keeping the specific character of each of our disciplinary contributions. And then, we could try to really work together on the subject as one mind. This question is as yet unsolved and can benefit from all the empirical experiences we can get from our own research and other's.

Into the West: Anthropology, Critically at Home

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This paper will address a number important issues that impinge on how anthropology can successfully engage with interdisciplinarity within a Westernised context. It looks at the crisis of identity in anthropology. This involves two important and related themes.

The first is the professional identity of social and cultural anthropologists. Secondly, the public imagination of anthropology and what anthropologists do.

The dominant and mostly unchallenged perception is that anthropologists deal principally with the remote and the exotic. The fairly recent trend towards 'anthropology at home' has come at some cost. Exotic anthropology is often considered 'real' or 'pure anthropology', while those who practice anthropology within the Western context are considered as somehow different. This has consequences in terms of accessing traditional research funds and grants and even job opportunities that may be closed to anthropologists who have not conducted ethnographic field research abroad.

Secondly, the issue of who we are and what we do in the public imagination is important (Sargent 2011). Many of us are engaged pragmatically in medical anthropology, in anthropology allied to health or in the more critical anthropology of health and illness. The particular approach taken is important since dominant ideological paradigms such as Western (bio)medicine, as well as a *priori* constructions, have the potential to significantly influence who we work with, and the type of research we conduct, as well as research outcomes. This needs closer inspection. This paper will argue for 'critical interdisciplinarity'. This affords a more nuanced approach offering a three-dimensional look at complex issues, situations and conditions. Anthropology importantly informs biomedicine, however, the process is two way (See Fainzang *et al* 2010). It will consider potential threats and drawbacks of interdisciplinary collegiality, including ideological, methodological and political jockeying; professional isolation; as well as the emic gaze, versus, evidence based practice.

Guiding references

Fainzang S H E Hem M B Risor (Eds) *The Taste for Knowledge: Medical Anthropology Facing Medical Realities*. Aarhus University Press 2010.

Moore R. G. Book Review, *The Taste for Knowledge: Medical Anthropology Facing Medical Realities*, *Sociology of Health and Illness* Vol 33, 4,656-657, 2011.

Sargent C 2011 See <http://socmedanthro.wordpress.com/> (accessed 6/22/11)

Into the world of acronyms: on anthropological engagements with the study of biotechnologies

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In my presentation I will discuss my ongoing research that is part of the trilateral project IMMIGENE on DNA analysis used in the context of family migration in Austria, Finland and Germany. Increasing restrictions on family reunification and immigration in general make explicit the omnipresent fight against supposed frauds. This also legitimates the biotechnological verification of family ties as a standard procedure when the documents are missing or regarded as invalid. Even though my paper does not deal with medical anthropology as such, the questions are in many ways parallel. The contributions of anthropologists are notable in the study of and around the biotechnologies. The conceptual opposition between the biological and the social family ties is the background in legislation on and policing of family reunification. The ways the notion of kinship takes form in science, in laboratory practices, in the courts and in debates brings to the fore how the supposed novelty brought about by

technologies can be framed and questioned by the classical questions regarding this very dichotomy.

Engaging with others: patient protection and the secrecy of experience

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During my on-going research project studying the experiences of kidney transplant recipients in Finland I came across a baffling example of the patient protection principle. Although kidney recipients attending rehabilitation courses organized by a national level patient organisation had signed consent forms allowing the social scientist to conduct participant observation of the course proceedings she was barred from small group discussions. The argument was that the presence of an outsider may hinder course participants from talking freely about their experiences of kidney disease. This incidence raises questions about the ethics of fieldwork and the shifting notions of the autonomous self. Patient protection principles follow a specific kind of logic within biomedicine as compared with anonymity principles stressed within anthropology. The gap created between these two perspectives leads to conflictive situations. The example presented sheds light on how gatekeepers participate in a process of 'othering' vis á vis the researcher. What is this secrecy all about and who has the right to decide which experiences can be shared ones and with whom this sharing takes place? In the presentation I will present the above case and ponder what possible practical strategies could be used to solve this dilemma.