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Anthropology Matters! in Brief

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Anthropology News ***invited members to report on the AAA Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, from reflections on a panels, to gonzo-style reporting, to anthropological impressions of the District.***

On "Detained on Trumped up Charges: Migrants and the Ascendant US Security-State"

Fiona Murphy

8:00 a.m. Wednesday morning, November 29—After a jetlagged night, I wake in the American Anthropological Association conference hotel to a media flurry about President Donald Trump's sharing of anti-Muslim videos from a British far-right group. It is my first time in the US since Trump's inauguration—it feels strikingly different and, yet somehow, the same. His garrulous talking head appears everywhere, the media caught in the stranglehold of reporting on his every move. I flick through news channels to escape him. It is impossible.

> ***The session highlighted how anthropologists confront the ongoing moral and ethical challenges of Trump's US Security-State in their work with migrants.***

11:30 a.m.—Somewhere in the depths of the National Museum of National Museum of African American History and Culture, I pass an older white American woman with tears in her eyes. She speaks aloud to no-one in particular, "I can't believe I was alive when all of this was happening." I stand next to her in the section of the museum detailing the impact of Jim Crow laws on the lives of African Americans. We both stare into the abyss of the history of lynchings—she appears caught in a twilight of knowing and not knowing. I move on, disturbed and emotional. Time to make my way back to the conference.

2:15 p.m.—Attending a roundtable session called **Detained on Trumped up Charges: Migrants and the Ascendant US Security-State**, my morning experiences come into sharp relief. The roundtable focused on how anthropological work with migrants has been further challenged by the daily incursions of the Trump administration. Both intellectually stimulating and keen to stress the importance of activism and advocacy, the session highlighted how anthropologists confront the ongoing moral and ethical challenges of Trump's US Security-State in their work with migrants. A politics of fear looms large in the everyday lives of **undocumented groups living across the US**. Speakers encapsulated the poignancy and horror of this as they detailed the challenges of both researching and advocating on behalf of **DREAMERS**, **the politics of deportation under Trump**, **the increasingly deleterious conditions in detention spaces, the shadow of the border wall and its politics.**

Much of what the speakers are now dealing with has a long history in the US—"criminal" and "immigrant" have long been fused in US immigration policy. Trump's rhetoric and practice, however, is distinct in its dehumanizing urgency. This has created a space where certain kinds of immigrants live suspended lives, arrested by fear and denigration.

Within this liminality, the anthropologists on the panel operate as ethical human beings, researchers and scholars, advocates, and activists. What featured most strikingly in this discussion was the sense of responsibility that anthropologists working in this space and time feel towards their research participants. Stories of solidarity, of protest, of loyalty, of advocacy inspired many audience members. In fact, the anthropologists speaking in this session are exactly the anthropologists who, **as Alisse Waterson stated in her Saturday evening Presidential Address,** aim to lift the cotton wool on radical evil—who ultimately make the space in that twilight of knowing and not knowing an impossible place to dwell in.

Fiona Murphy is an anthropologist in the Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice in Queen's University Belfast.

On Scarves, Serpents, and Solidarity
Taylor R. Genovese

Ding dong. The seatbelt signal chimes just as a sickening drop of turbulence wakes me from my shallow sleep and causes me to hit my head against the drink cart. I blink through the rude awakening and request a drink from the flight attendant. I let the buzz of white noise wash over me until the screech and thump of the landing gear shakes me out of my sleep deprived daze.

We are a collective of scarf-wearing agitators ready to show compassion in a time when compassion itself is an act of resistance.

The Marriott conference hotel is located perpendicular to the National Zoo. Walking through a sea of anthropologists, I feel as though there is a mirrored culture between the two locations. The one that I'm walking through is perhaps more friendly, less violent, and, rather than animals, it houses sentient scarves that mount their social scientist hosts. If you haven't attended a AAA Annual Meeting, I must warn you, from a distance, it truly is a dizzying expanse of impressionist scarf aesthetics that surge, twist, and contort through the lobby—seemingly as one being.

Meanwhile, a less whimsical, inverse mirroring was happening between a conference dedicated to the idea that "Anthropology Matters!" and a gathering of destructive individuals on Capitol Hill who were enacting tax legislation that matter-of-factly announced "Anthropology Doesn't Matter!," "People of Color Don't Matter!," "The Poor Do. Not. Matter."

Honestly, I was feeling very elitist, despite the fact that the recent legislation could financially incapacitate me. How could I sit on panels and roundtables preaching to the choir that anthropology matters, while within the same city, legislators were waging what amounts to a kind of class war? How does cloistered pontificating assist in removing the metaphorical snake's head?

There is no doubt a critique exists here. But I realized that this year's conference served a different, but important, purpose. As I attended the first **AnthropologyCon**, played games created by anthropologists, and enjoyed drinks with old and new friends, I recognized that this year's Annual Meeting provided an important survival mechanism to our living in difficult times: ***solidarity***. The many sessions devoted to engagement and discussion, and those that focused on the future, seemed to tear down the artificial barriers between us and illuminate our shared kinship.

This year, I did not observe as much egotistical bickering as in other years. I heard more colleagues asking, "Are you alright?" and, "How can I help?" In the violent tidal wave of our current reality, I sensed an undertow that ran electric-like but unspoken throughout the conference: you matter; we matter! Maybe an academic conference cannot solve our socio-political problems, but it can give us the venue to support each other—to show that we are a collective of scarf-wearing agitators ready to show compassion in a time when compassion itself is an act of resistance.

Taylor R. Genovese is a doctoral student in Human and Social Dimensions of Science and Technology at Arizona State University. Follow him at **@trgenovese** or find out more at

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Are #NastyWomen Complicit in Classist Commodity Activism?
Vivian Gornik

Does the Facebook platform present structural limitations for LBGTQ+ members when they create online profile identities? How does the alt-right social media lexicon normalize white supremacy through sexually explicit and violent language? How do online gaming communities like use digital discourse to discriminate against female gamers? These were just some of the fascinating questions posed in the AAA Annual Meeting session titled "From the Alt-Right to Social Justice Warriors: Gender Politics and Social Media," on Thursday, November 30th.

> ***What can we do to make sure that our display and performance of activism does not exclude the very people for whom we seek social justice?***

The potentially classist nature of the #NastyWoman and #ShePersisted movements caught my attention in Chloe Brotherton's paper, "#Nastywomenpersist: Political resistance through resignification of pejorative phrases on Facebook." Most of us will remember the second presidential debate in October 2016 when then-candidate and now-President (not to mention, notorious mansplainer) Donald Trump prowled behind Hillary Clinton on stage and referred to her as "such a nasty woman." The #ShePersisted movement emerged a few months later when Senator Elizabeth Warren objected to the confirmation of Jeff Sessions as US Attorney General and was silenced by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. McConnell's now infamous words were: "She had appeared to violate the rule. She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted."

"Due to the ubiquitous and instantaneous nature of social media," Brotherston argues, "these phrases underwent immediate resignification and recontextualization from a pejoration from the right to a slogan to the left." Brotherton's showed how numerous Facebook groups mobilized this lexical reclamation, as members identified themselves as "nasty women."

Participation in these online social justice movements also includes the purchase and subsequent display of products emblazoned with the now famous hashtags. I, myself, have considered buying a #NastyWoman t-shirt, or the famous pink "pussy hats" worn to the Women's March in Washington, DC. Brotherton raised the point that many of these women are engaging in "commodity activism" (Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser 2012), a form of political activism in neoliberal times that is not

necessarily in opposition to consumerism. Rather, and perhaps more often than we care to admit, such social justice movements require activists to participate in the capitalist consumption and display of objects that embody the movement's political message. So what does this mean for the accessibility of activism?

As anthropologists, we aim to consider intersectional perspectives on all the issues we study. I agree with Brotherton that we need to explore the potentially exclusionary practices of commodity activism in which many of us have taken part. Perhaps the money used to purchase these products could be donated non-profit organizations? But, beyond that, what does our commodity activism ***do*** outside of social media? What can we do to make sure that our display and performance of activism does not exclude the very people for whom we seek social justice?

Vivian Gornik is currently a PhD Candidate in Applied Anthropology at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

Speaking Justice to Power
Jeffrey Omari

"Speaking Justice to Power," a special event hosted by the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology (APLA) and ***Political and Legal Anthropology Review*** at this year's AAA meeting in Washington DC, addressed the ways anthropology can play a larger role in today's contested political climate. Guest speakers Laura Nader, Orisanmi Burton, Ayse Parla, and Sara Schneiderman spoke to a banquet room packed full of anthropologists at Busboys and Poets, a bookstore and café known as a local favorite among artists and for its rich cultural diversity. The APLA audience was mostly white and, sadly, did not reflect the ethnic diversity elsewhere in the venue. The speakers' perspectives were bold and unique. Laura Nader began the evening's discussion by arguing that anthropological discourse speaks too much to anthropologists and that a publicly engaged anthropology must speak to the ***public***. I often feel that peer-reviewed articles and academic books speak to very limited audiences and have wondered how, in my own work, I might reach beyond anthropology and speak to a broader public. In offering suggestions for how anthropologists might take on this challenge, Nader suggested we think creatively and noted Michael Moore's film, ***Where to Invade Next***, as a project with the type of political and geographic content that anthropologists are well placed to tackle.

APLA “Speaking Justice to Power” event. Jeffrey Omari.

One of the evening’s more stimulating discussions addressed the role of hope in political agency. Given the theme of the roundtable, the topic was ideal for a room full of anthropologists who often engage in abstract theoretical discussions. Laura Nader noted that she despised the word “hope,” primarily because she feels it’s lost its value after Obama’s presidential campaigns. Ayse Parla discussed the role of hope in the Turkish political climate and called for a reorientation of the word. Orisanmi Burton offered a rather pragmatic idea: substituting the word “strategy” for “hope.” Just as no one believes they can win in the absence of hope, the same can be said for strategy. Indeed, strategy offers a tangible and more practical alternative to hope in today’s partisan political atmosphere. For Burton, a more public anthropology must be both strategic and nuanced and, after his call to substitute hope with strategy, he suggested that a publicly engaged anthropology must be one with praxis –the ability to practically apply theory to the needs of the public.

Burton’s call for praxis and strategic political action was fitting for the venue, which featured a backdrop with images of the Dali Lama, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. More importantly, the insights offered by the panelists provided hands-on methods for anthropologists and other concerned citizens to put into practice and speak justice to power.

Jeffrey Omari is a PhD candidate at UC Santa Cruz and a doctoral fellow at the American Bar Foundation.

Who Is Anthropology Meant for?
Steven G. Harris

The panel "**Anthropology matters for professionals! Forging non-academic career pathways at the graduate and undergraduate level**" focused on the significance of anthropology within the professional field, a topic I personally consider endearing and relevant. Not everyone prefers to pursue an academic career in anthropology, but it is easy to fall into the illusion that unless you are going after a tenure track position, you haven't made it. These panelists' careers—ranging from administrative work, statistical analysis, and collaborative projects—make it clear that tenure is not all there is to anthropology.

Before this conference, I was uncertain which route I wanted to take in the discipline, but this panel helped assuage that uncertainty. Presenter Karla Davis-Salazar asked the question, "How much of your anthropological knowledge, do you desire to bring into your career?" Personally, I hope to apply as much anthropological knowledge as possible in whatever I do.

But, it comes down to this: who is anthropology meant for? Take for example the exhibition hall book sale in the Lincoln Rooms of the conference center this year. There was a large array of books with fascinating titles and premises that may have reminded some of us of those fun filled weekends at the library growing up. Yet, how much of the material published is relevant or legible to the public? Presenter Lisa Renda Taylor pointed out that "accessibility and language are key; it matters how the material being published gets back to the population and how it is being done."

As a discipline, if we want to make the field more appealing to new students, we need to better communicate how anthropology can bring about important contributions in whatever route a student decides to take. At the same time, it is essential that we making strides in changing the language used in anthropology to make it more accessible to the public, because, at the end of the day, isn't that who anthropology is meant for?

Steven G. Harris is a first year PhD student at Syracuse University, who enjoys bowling and traveling in his free time.

Looking Back to Go Forward
Rebecca Prinster

For those of us not directly involved in researching the history of anthropology, this particular area of focus may seem to be too stuck-in-the-past. Despite that assumption, though, the Friday afternoon panel "**New Directions in the History of Anthropology**" that I attended showed how the

history of anthropology is constantly reimagining old ways of thinking about the formation of the field.

> ***If we assume too readily that the history of anthropology is irrelevant to the present, then we risk making the same mistakes of the past.***

All of the presentations dealt with pivotal moments in the history of anthropology, but I was especially struck by Mindy Morgan's and Margaret Bruchac's presentations for the way they challenged me to rethink what I thought I knew about the early days of the field and about the authority of museums, respectively.

Morgan, associate professor at Michigan State University, presented her paper on the ways in which gender dynamics in the early days of the field helped shape the discipline of anthropology by tracking men and women into specific roles. Men were more often linked to research and producing scientific knowledge and were given academic appointments. Women, on the other hand, were tracked into teaching-focused positions or resorted to museum work.

Morgan talked about early anthropologists who engaged with Native communities and how men were more often tasked with helping to shape policy related to Indian Country, while women did ethnography that was meant to humanize and relativize Indigenous people. During the Q-and-A section after the panel, Morgan asked—rhetorically—whether these patterns of tracking by gender are being repeated in academia today. For example, as one audience member pointed out, fourth-fifths of NSF grants in archaeology are awarded to men, despite women comprising 52 percent of SAA members.

Bruchac, assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania, also challenged the audience to rethink the objectivity of museum interpretation. She urged caution when looking at early ethnographic data on objects—particularly those from Native communities—as this data was rarely neutral and often presented racialized and essentialized fictions of people and objects. She advocated for what she calls reverse ethnography and restorative methodologies; this involves doing more in-depth research into the provenance of objects by "reconstructing patterns of collection and correspondence" and "tracking the collectors and their collections over space and time."

Bruchac likened objects that have been mishandled and mislocated to tribal children who went through the residential school system—despite how far removed these children may have been

from their communities during the assimilation process of the boarding schools, they're trying to find their way home, and they're still kin.

Discussant Richard Handler, professor at the University of Virginia, encapsulated the presentations by going back to something Bruchac said. She had pointed out that exhibit labels can become tools of erasure when we assume that they are objective. Along those lines, if we assume too readily that the history of anthropology is irrelevant to the present, then we risk making the same mistakes of the past. As Handler said, "Anthropologists are always creating work that is historically situated and contested, which should make us humble about how we view the scientific objectivity of our work."

Rebecca Prinster is a master's student in ethnology at the University of New Mexico.

Comparative Studies on Theory of Mind
Ipsita Dey

The panel "A New Comparativism: Spiritual Curiosity and the Experience of God "featured papers from a multi-sited, collaborative, and comparative ethnographic study on the cross-cultural development of theory of mind in spiritual contexts. Tanya Luhrmann and her team of colleagues sought to answer: How is God talking to people, and how can these people distinguish God's voice? How do these relationships with God differ in cultural and religious contexts, and how do these spiritual relationships affect daily living and sense-making? To answer these questions, a team of scholars conducted fieldwork in Ghana, China, Thailand, Oceania, and the Bay Area (US). Researchers used standardized interview questions and spoke once a week through Skype, sharing ethnographic data and emerging findings with each other. These frequent, scheduled meetings allowed ethnographers to "think through" the data while still in the fieldwork stage, engaging findings from other geographic locations and focusing on the larger, comparative research questions.

> ***This research challenges our perspectives on traditional ethnographic methodologies, and begs the question: Are we moving towards a future of collaborative fieldwork?***

Luhrmann introduced the purpose and goals of this research study by discussing the "False Belief" test, a classical psychological experiment demonstrating theory of mind, or the ability to distinguish that others may have different beliefs, desires, and intentions than one's own. Luhrmann continued to discuss how this concept of the "mind" can be likened to a container, a holder of beliefs, desires, and intentions. As Luhrmann points out, these containers can be understood differently across

cultures and in spiritual contexts. In China, God sends messages through acute physical pain; in the United States, an anthropomorphic God speaks in English and directly to a devotee. These relationships with God reflect different understandings of the mind and its abilities to perceive. As this project continues, researchers hope to gain a deeper understanding of how theories of mind in spiritual contexts affect and influence contemporary experiences.

I was most intrigued by the question of how reflexivity operates in comparative ethnographic work. Seminal work by Jean Briggs, Vincent Crapanzano, and other anthropologists have established the importance of acknowledging positionality and subjectivity in ethnographer-informant relationships. We know that ethnography is specific to the ethnographer: one anthropologist in the same place as another might make different observations. What happens to the ethnographer's subjectivity when conducting collaborative work? This research challenges our perspectives on traditional ethnographic methodologies, and begs the question: Are we moving towards a future of collaborative fieldwork?

Ipsita Dey recently graduated from UCLA with a major in Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics and a minor in Anthropology. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork on domestic violence in England, and hopes to continue studying anthropology in graduate school.

On "Health Brain, Healthy Mind: Eluding the Stigmatic Nature of Mental Health in Oklahoma"
Monesha Carter

I had the pleasure of attending the session, "Studies of Body, Mind, Brain in Psychological Anthropology." One paper in particular caught my interest: "Healthy Brain, Healthy Mind: Eluding the Stigmatic Nature of Mental Health in Oklahoma" by Keith Kleszynski. Kleszynski works on the Healthy Brain, Healthy Mind program at the Oklahoma Healthy Aging Initiative (OHAI). This program was particularly designed for aging populations. Kleszynski studied the effectiveness of the Healthy Brain, Healthy Mind course for participants from different racial and economic backgrounds.

> ***What piqued my interest most was Kleszynski's finding that black Section 8 participants became more depressed after the final evaluations in the Healthy Brain, Healthy Mind program.***

What piqued my interest most was Kleszynski's finding that black Section 8 participants became more depressed after the final evaluations in the Healthy Brain, Healthy Mind program; participants

said they never really talked to a therapist before and that it allowed them to think in depth about their life goals and achievements.

His observation reminded me of the stigma in the black community about utilizing mental health resources, like actually reaching out to get help from a therapist. It is okay to speak with a community pastor, but I also believe there needs to be balance in the black community of not only engaging spiritually but taking care of ourselves mentally, physically, and emotionally. The strength and resilience of black people can sometimes also be the weakness that impedes us. It is okay to seek help from mental health professionals in addition to utilizing the local church.

Monesha Carter is a master's student at Eastern University in the Theology and Cultural Anthropology program. Her focus is psychological anthropology, and she enjoys volunteering in her community.

Anthropology's Unfinished Business
Ipsita Dey

How can we ethnographically research and represent the process of becoming, the unfinished business of life? The panel "**Unfinished: The Anthropology of Becoming**" featured anthropologists seeking to answer such questions. They ethnographically explore: the multiplicity and plasticity of human/non-human interaction; emerging realities in time, space, and desire; and perspectives on the possible and potential.

> ***Our discipline, anthropology, has many strengths—storytelling is one of them.***

Originally published as chapters in an edited volume, these papers conveyed an especially striking — and relevant — range of topics, geographic specialties, and historical interests. From Chicago to Cypress, panelists spoke to "situated cartographic approaches" and the steps they have taken toward understanding "self-world entanglements."

The panel began with a stirring vignette from the streets of urban Chicago, as Laurence Ralph introduced the audience to Ms. Lana, a mother who lost her son to gun violence. Ralph uses Ms. Lana's experience of devastation in the wake of her son's death to discuss how anger and resentment can serve a greater good when directed to social problems and destabilize hierarchies of power and care.

Next, Angela Garcia's powerful writing enabled the audience to experience the rhythmic pounding of voices exploding in protest in Mexico's public square in response to the 43 college students who had been kidnapped earlier in the year. Voices rose in fear and anger as protesters acknowledged the omniscient presence of violence in their lives. Using the example of these Mexican protesters fighting to make sense of the violence perpetrated daily and intergenerationally in their lives, Garcia argues that destruction and creation are both conditions and processes of becoming.

Panelists' consistent use of powerful imagery was striking. Repeatedly, I sank into fieldwork settings painted by words: smelling the mass graves in Elizabeth Davis's paper, "Objects of Creation," or feeling the slowing heartbeat of a dying cow as in Naisargi Dave's paper, "Question Machines: Relationality and Inner-Scaling in Today's Urban Space-times." Each paper featured a short but powerful vignette, a fieldwork story that moved me.

As I reflected on my previous experiences attending panels at the AAA conference, it dawned on me that although my notebook was filled with new theories, concepts, and ideas, what I remembered most from panel papers were the moving, gripping, sometimes heart-racing stories from the field. The raw humanity in ethnographic fieldwork—the vulnerability, passion, and fear—makes vignettes still the most exciting part of any paper, at least for me.

Our discipline, anthropology, has many strengths—storytelling is one of them. I look forward to a future where we, as anthropologists, capitalize on our storytelling abilities to enrapture hearts and minds with powerful words, and in the process, inspire change and introduce new perspectives.

Ipsita Dey recently graduated from UCLA with a major in Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics and a minor in Anthropology. She conducted ethnographic fieldwork on domestic violence in England, and hopes to continue studying anthropology in graduate school.

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