

ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE'S FIRST ANNUAL POSTGRADUATE CONFERENCE

Department of Anthropology, Durham University, 20 September 2011

The Royal Anthropological Institute's first annual one-day postgraduate conference was hosted by the Department of Anthropology at Durham University on 20 September 2011. In their opening remarks, Bob Simpson, and Stephen M Lyon referred to the RAI's vision for this annual conference, where 30 postgraduate students from more than 17 universities and institutes presented their research. Stephen Lyon then introduced the use of the Anthropological Index Online in anthropological research. RAI's Film Officer, Susanne Hammacher and Education and Communication Officer, Nafisa Fera introduced the range of RAI's activities, inviting participants to take an active role. Both sessions showed how the RAI can help to increase the visibility of students' research in the discipline. In an interactive session with journal editors (Stephen M. Lyon of *History and Anthropology*, Claudia Merli of *Durham Anthropology Journal*, and Simone Gritter and Ely Rosenblum of the online multimedia journal *ART/E/FACT*), students gained information about getting published in anthropological journals.

The conference was structured in plenary sessions reflecting the thematic and regional diversity of the research being conducted by UK postgraduates. One topic concerned the study of human impacts on the natural world and the sustainability of limited resources. Highlighting the struggle between financial gains and the preservation of sacred landscapes, Amy Hannington presented an insightful look at Adivasi resistance against mining companies seeking to extract local minerals for profit. Similarly, James Howard provided a detailed ethnographic account of a day in the lives of Sri Lankan fishermen and their role in the international ornamental fish trade, where increasing pressures to harvest are resulting in diminished returns. Joanne Brady reported on the everyday uses, benefits, pitfalls, and purpose of the modern electric car amongst owners in the UK.

Gender proved to be another theme. For instance, Mary-Anne Decatur presented her research on female genital cutting and Azal Ahmadi spoke on the hidden practice of hymenoplasty in Iran. Similarly, Bowen Wei (Edinburgh) and Fiona Hukula (St. Andrews) deconstructed stereotypes of maleness and femaleness through their ethnographic findings amongst an all-gay men's rugby team in Scotland and an urban community in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, respectively.

Multi-disciplinary research on contemporary issues pertaining to reproductive health and sexualities was another important topic addressed here. David Lawrence grappled with the evaluation of peer-led sex education in eastern Uganda, and Lina Cristina Casadó gave a provocative and challenging talk on explanatory models of bodily self-harm among young people in Spain. Some presentations focused on women's health and identity. Among such presentations were Mirza Taslima Sultana's talk on discourses of motherhood and self-identity in middle class Bangladesh, while Melanie Dembinski, Caitlin O'Grady, and Brianne Wenning explored the lived experience of women's health issues.

Other dimensions surrounding health and medicine were also addressed. Rachel Douglas-Jones discussed the concepts of integrity, trust, and accountability within a Philippine bioethics committee. Dori Beeler, Sarah Chitty, Maidul Chaklader and Chiamaka Okafor

reported on local perceptions of illness in different parts of the world and how often the treatment of diseases by means of traditional remedies can be successful. Likewise, Ayaz Qureshi discussed HIV and the structural violence of Pakistani labour migration systems to Persian Gulf countries, invoking Agamben's concept of the 'bare life' to explain how migrants' worth is entirely dependent on the 'value' of their bodies.

Not surprisingly, power and identity also proved an enduring theme. Aurang Zeb Mughal focused on how Friday is a particularly important weekday that has come to be associated with Muslim identity since Pakistan established itself as an independent nation state. Adnan Khan contextualised Pukhtun identity in Pakistan through religion and history, while Andrea Butcher presented on the relationship between religious authority and cultural identity in Buddhist Ladakh, and Shuhua Chen explored the formation of Chinese identity through particular architectural symbols. Power dynamics were highlighted in presentations given by Ivan Costantino, Brian Campbell, and Matt Wilde. Responses to economic tensions were addressed by Michele Fontefrancesco, who talked about the social perspectives of the recent non-linear economic crisis in the Italian city of Valenza. Similarly, Sufyan Abid's paper on Tamil Indian Muslim entrepreneurs in Malaysia, focusing on Islamic reformism, and Chi-Pui Cheung's paper on the social practice of policy with reference to urban struggle in China, highlighted responses towards economic tensions. A small number of presentations also focused on symbolic aspects of cultures such as Alex Rugens's talk about the influence of cognitive priming on ghost beliefs in Britain, and Antonia Knifton's study on the use and customs of jesting behaviour in the New Caledonian Tuo-Cemuhi linguistic area. Magdalena Buchczyk's talk reflected ethnographic perspectives on fieldwork and how to translate these into curatorship models in order to increase the impact of museum exhibits.

An ethnographic photography exhibition organised by Emilie Fairet was also held during the conference, highlighting the colour and shape of current postgraduate research at Durham University. Conference conveners Erika McClure, Aurang Zeb Mughal, and Carla Handley are currently co-editing a special edition of the *Durham Anthropology Journal* that features a selection of conference papers. ●

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