

ANTHROPOLOGY *IN PRACTICE*

News from the Society for Applied Anthropology in Manitoba (Inc.) S.A.A.M. INC.

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President's Report

You will find in this newsletter the minutes of our Annual General Meeting, which was not very well attended this year. They reflect the results of much hard work on the part of many and the accomplishments of SAAM last year. We plan on another exciting year for SAAM, starting off with a presentation from the president of the University of Manitoba, Dr. E. Szatmáry. We also have several excellent speakers lined up for the Spring.

An important event that we are starting to prepare is a conference on the effects of globalization, as viewed by anthropologists, economists, and business. The tentative date is set for March 11, 2000. This kind of conference will help pool the knowledge of many well-known specialists from Manitoba and other province in order to help up reflect, in this year of the Millenium, on what kind of future transnational corporations and the "Free Trade" agreements are building for our society. Will "what is

good for General Motors" provide you with good food, with good health care?

From cradle to coffin, we are spanked, pricked with needles, cut open, treated and adjusted by a commercially controlled and driven medical establishment which defines what we are and what drugs are essential to our well-being. In her editorial, Monica Wiest suggests that the drug which is good for the pharmaceutical industry may not be good for you, and that some of the assumptions of the medical establishment, most particularly its focus on individuals, may not be acceptable to anthropologists attentive to the power of social structures and institutions. Her reflection is particularly relevant as it prepares us for Dr. Szatmáry's presentation on diabetes and other health problems in northern Canada, which will be **Saturday, November 27** at 11:00 a.m. in the conference room of the **Pembina Trail Library, 2724 Pembina Highway.**

One of the great achievements of SAAM this

year is the preparation of a Web site for SAAM by Roy Dudgeon, assisted by Alan Suchan. I shall tell you our web address at our next meeting, and it will be printed in the next issue of the newsletter. Some of you have not yet renewed your membership: please do so as soon as possible as we need your moral (and financial) support!

Jean-Luc Chodkiewicz

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S.A.A.M. Presentation Summary (September 25, 1999)

*Dr. George Fulford:
Changing Concepts of Work in an
Omushkegowak Community*

In this paper Professor George Fulford of Department of Anthropology at the University of Winnipeg examined changing concepts of work in Peawanuck, an Omushkegowak ("Swampy Cree") community located near the southwest coast of Hudson Bay, in northern Ontario. Dr. Fulford's paper is part of a larger ethnography in progress about the Winisk First nation and is based on observations he made during a two-year stay in this small fly-in-reserve community.

Dr. Fulford began with a brief description of Peawanuck, which was followed by a summary of his recent research on land use, local employment and household income among the Omushkegowak. He then presented an in-depth case study of five Peawanuck families. Dr. Fulford discussed the high cost of living in Peawanuck, noting that all items in the local store, which is run by the band council, are subject to a \$4.60 per kilo airfreight charge. Thus, milk costs \$4 a litre, butter \$7 a pound, hamburger \$10 a kilo and flour \$25 for a five kilo bag. Gasoline purchased at the local store is \$1.50 a litre. The high cost of these and other items counteracts any benefits of the relatively low housing costs (\$200 a month for a four-bedroom bungalow).

Dr. Fulford provided a detailed family-by-family breakdown of household income and expenditures to demonstrate how many Peawanuck families cannot afford to purchase all their foodstuffs at the local store. Consequently most households in the community continue to rely on traditional subsistence activities to put food on the table. Those who cannot

supplement their diet with 'country food' risk going into debt at the local store or defaulting in their rent payments to the band council. Given the extreme nature of winters in Peawanuck, the isolated nature of the community and the lack of local wage employment, the band council has adopted a policy of leniency. Tenants are not evicted from their houses for non-payment of rent nor are customers at the store denied credit should they be unable to pay off their outstanding accounts. The long-term effect of this policy is to compromise the ability of the band council and store to meet their own financial obligations.

Dr. Fulford concluded by noting that the long-term financial health of Peawanuck rests on a mix of wage employment and traditional subsistence activities. Indeed, one of the most promising sources of wage employment in the community is ecotourism, which itself relies on the highly-developed bush skills of local guides and tour operators. To deny the continuing importance of traditional bush skills and subsistence activities in Peawanuck's economy is, in the long term, to flirt with financial ruin.

Editor's Corner

Medical anthropologists are constantly involved in situations where they are called upon to apply their anthropological expertise to the solution of real and often urgent problems. Through their involvement in the health realm, they have raised many questions about the concepts of health and disease and the delivery of health care. The nature of their involvement is diverse: some medical anthropologists work in a clinical setting alongside medical practitioners, some study non-western medical systems, while others explore the nature of integration of two or

more medical systems. Critical medical anthropologists analyse the impact of Western medicine practice on the individual and society in a capitalistic-oriented world. Consider from such a perspective experiences such as stress, hunger, depression or anorexia. Hunger immediately evokes the concept of social, economic, and political inequity: but unlike hunger, are not stress, depression, and anorexia individual problems that should be treated individually? Biomedicine, the dominant medical model in North America, assumes the premise of disengaged individuals who are solely responsible for his or her own health. Pills are available to treat everything 'abnormal' from menopause to anger to shyness to treat 'individual' problems (have you had social anxiety disorder all these years?), it has become blatant that the stakeholders in medicine are not only extracting meaning from the social realm but also extensive profits. This is perpetuated by pharmaceutical companies, obsessed with patents and profits, who seek to exploit and control resourceful areas, be it an ecological area or a specific illness. The power of biomedicine, justified by its marketable and 'objective' prowess, lies in its ability to individualize and, thus, depoliticize people's state of well-being.

Nancy Scheper-Hughes portrays an extreme example of this in her applied study of a northeastern Brazil *favela* (shantytown) in which hunger is diagnosed as a nerve sickness – by politicians, physicians and 'the hungry' – and is treated with tranquillizers rather than food. Like hunger in Brazil, stress has become medicalized here in Canada. Tranquilizers, sleeping pills, therapy, herbs (and for those who can afford it, massage therapy, aromatherapy, etc.) are treatments to combat stress and fatigue from hectic schedules and demanding institutions. While we understand stress may be rooted in excessive workloads (among other factors), we still treat the consequential stress as an illness of

the individual rather than questioning the social and political structures that trigger or worsen the conditions.

The ability to individualize treatment has undoubtedly saved countless lives and prevented the occurrence of life-threatening or undesirable conditions (undesirable by whom, though?). At the same time, treatment is frequently impersonal, experimental, and devoid of meaning: in the attempt to 'combat' disease, there is little effort to acknowledge personal or cultural experiential knowledge and beliefs. The result is a lack of genuine healing, either emotional or spiritual, of those affected directly or indirectly by the illness.

The structure and practice of biomedicine is strikingly relevant for social scientists concerned with the integrity of humanity when we consider that the Western medical system is reliant upon and driven by capitalist premises. The commodification of our health will only become more ubiquitous if individuals and groups do not try to identify and protest against the roots of this problem. Nonetheless, an understanding of the macro level issues does not deny the importance of exploring the experience with illness of individuals or social groups nor does it confine us to neglect the micro level of interaction between systems and individuals. In this light, any approach to addressing illness is bound to one's appraisal of the problem.

How one defines health, or the 'absence of disease or illness' shapes one's perspective, research and communication of a medical system. There exists much debate about the approaches, roles and responsibilities of medical anthropologists in the context of a dominant biomedical model – as interpreters, facilitators, educators, researchers, and/or critiquers. In this commentary I by no means pretend to address

the diversity of perspectives and experiences inherent in the field of medical anthropology. As such, it would be useful to hear from those involved in the exploration of illness experiences to better understand the strengths and limitations and varying experiences of the different applied roles. It would be effective to examine these roles in terms of their conjunction with biomedicine, alongside an analysis of the values, processes and practices that have shaped our medical system (a long-winded call for such presenters at SAAM meetings!).

Monica Wiest

References

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For those interested in the differing paradigms of medical anthropology see:

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Book Review

Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil, by Nancy Scheper-Hughes. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. 614 pp.

Death Without Weeping: The Everyday Violence of Brazil is a powerful and eloquently written ethnography which addresses pertinent and contemporary anthropological concerns. Everyday violence—imposed by centuries of various forms of domination and inequality—hunger, mother love and child death are central themes in Nancy Scheper-Hughes' analysis of everyday life in a marginalized northeastern Brazil rural town. Scheper-Hughes writes *Death Without Weeping* after returning to a Brazilian shantytown 18 years after her initial experience as a Peace Corps volunteer. Her vivid and personal account focuses primarily on the women and children (who are predominant numerically in this town) who endure chronic hunger, malnutrition, and experience a climate of 'ordinary' child death. By tracing the colonial history of the local plantation economy to the present-day sugar industry, the author contextualizes the local social relations and survival strategies of people dealing with poverty and hunger. In the first part of the book, she discusses the hunger which has been gradually transformed into a polysemic illness, *nervos*. She argues that *nervos* is a condition that has been medicalized and treated with tranquilizers and pain killers instead of food—and structural change. The latter half considers maternal behaviour and child death. The author examines how mothers make choices about the survival of their children, based on a child's behavioural predisposition to survival, or its will to live.

As one might guess, *Death Without Weeping* is not a neutral account, but it is an

honest one. Scheper-Hughes, self-admittedly, is quite political and critical of the politicians, social scientists and scientists who have misrepresented or even masked the underlying causes of the social suffering that exists in so much of the impoverished Northeast Brazil. Rich for those interested in anthropological theory, methodology and application, *Death Without Weeping* raises difficult questions of moral and ethical relativism. The author provides a relevant critique on the assumption of a value-free science (and observation) and, in doing so, manages to gracefully straddle the gap between an empirical and hermeneutic representation of people with whom she lived. Not only a study, she overcame her initial resistance and actively engaged on a political level with the community at its insistence. Her motivation, in the end, I think was to try to raise people's social consciousness(es) about their daily suffering. While this effort may be contentious to some, the underlying message, that anthropology should be active and committed, is significant to applied anthropologists.

Annual General Meeting for the Society for Applied Anthropology in Manitoba of 26 September, 1999

SAAM members met for the 1999 Annual General Meeting at the Mennonite Central Church in Fort Gary. Present were: Jean-Luc Chodkiewicz, Menno Wiebe, George Fulford, Mark Manzer, Monica Wiest, George Nikou, Ray Dudgeon, Allan Suchan, Bonnie Trodden, Doug Watson, Sylvia Martins, Paula Migliardi. The meeting opened with President Jean-Luc Chodkiewicz recapitulating the year's events. In addition to its regular monthly lecture series, highlights of the year included SAAM's hosting of a conference on the Northern Flood Agreement at the University of

Winnipeg in February and publication of a volume of papers presented at the conference under the joint auspices for the Centre for Ruperts Land Studies in August. George Fulford, Secretary, read the President's activity report, reprinted in the September 1999 newsletter. Bonnie moved that the President's report be accepted. This motion was seconded by Mark Manzer and passed unanimously by all members in attendance. Mark Manzer, Treasurer, presented his annual financial report. Menno Wiebe complemented Mr. Manzer's efforts in preparing the report. As this was the first year SAAM had hosted a conference and published its proceedings, Mr. Wiebe suggested that it would be desirable to append a statement to the Treasurer's report detailing all income and expenses related to the conference and publication. Menno Wiebe then moved to accept the report. The motion was seconded by Monica Wiest and passed unanimously.

Following this were elections for the 1999–2001 SAAM Executive. Menno Wiebe was nominated for President by Allan Suchan, seconded by Monica Wiest. Mr. Wiebe reluctantly turned down the position and in turn nominated Jean-Luc Chodkiewicz for another term. His nomination was seconded by George Fulford. Jean-Luc commented that he had already served as President for two terms and indicated his reluctance to continue in the position for another full term. He also stated that he would be in Mexico for the 2000–2001 academic year and thus would be unable to serve as President during that time. Allan Suchan suggested that Dr. Chodkiewicz consider accepting the position for one year, leaving the Executive time to find a suitable candidate to replace him. Dr. Chodkiewicz agreed to Mr. Suchan's suggestion and was unanimously returned as President.

Bonnie nominated Menno Wiebe as Vice-President. Her nomination was seconded by George Fulford. Mr. Wiebe accepted the nomination and was unanimously elected. Mark Manzer nominated Gary Granzberg as Vice-President. This motion was seconded by Bonnie. Dr. Chodkiewicz noted that Dr. Granzberg was absent from the meeting and that the result of any vote for the Vice-President's position would be contingent on Dr. Granzberg accepting the nomination. With this qualification, members unanimously voted Dr. Granzberg Vice-President.

Doug Watson nominated George Fulford as Secretary. This was seconded by George Nikou. Dr. Fulford accepted the nomination and the members unanimously returned him as Secretary.

Menno Wiebe nominated Mark Manzer for a second term as Treasurer. Allan Suchan seconded the motion. Mr. Manzer accepted the nomination and was returned to the position unanimously.

Monica Wiest nominated Allan Suchan as editor of the newsletter (a position he has held since last year). The nomination was seconded by Doug Watson. Mr. Suchan accepted the nomination, but indicated that he would only be able to serve as editor for one year. Bonnie Trodden moved that the position of co-editor be created. This was seconded by George Fulford and accepted by a unanimous vote of the members. Bonnie then nominated Monica Wiest as co-editor. The motion was seconded by George Fulford. Ms. Wiest accepted the nomination and members voted unanimously to elect her to the newly-created position.

Mark Manzer nominated Doug Watson as SAAM student representative at the University of Manitoba. The nomination was seconded by Roy Dudgeon. Doug accepted the position and the members voted unanimously in support of the candidate. George Fulford nominated Kimberley Wilde as SAAM student representative at the University of Winnipeg. The nomination was seconded by Mark Manzer, who noted that as the

candidate was not present at the meeting, the final results of the vote would be contingent on her acceptance of the position. With this qualification, members voted unanimously in support of the candidate.

Following the election of the 1999–2001 SAAM Executive, Dr. Chodkiewicz invited members to discuss new business. Menno Wiebe suggested that the President of SAAM meet with the newly-elected Premier of Manitoba and his (as yet unannounced) Minister of Northern Affairs and present them with copies of SAAM's proceedings on the Northern Flood Agreement conference. Dr. Chodkiewicz endorsed Mr. Wiebe's idea and also noted the importance of establishing a SAAM website.

George Fulford presented a motion to create an executive position of Webmaster. The motion was seconded by Mark Manzer and unanimously supported by all members. Roy Dudgeon and Allan Suchan indicated their willingness to serve as webmasters. George Fulford nominated Roy Dudgeon as webmaster. This was seconded by Mark Manzer. Mr. Dudgeon was elected into the newly-created position unanimously. Menno Wiebe moved that Allan Suchan be nominated as assistant webmaster. The nomination was seconded by Mark Manzer. Allan Suchan was unanimously elected assistant webmaster. Following this the discussion of new business ended and the annual meeting of SAAM ended. Additional note: Dr. G. Granzberg declined the nomination to the post of Vice-President.

**Make sure you listen for the
address of our new web site at the
next SAAM meeting on Saturday,
November 27th!**
