
David F. Martin [David.Martin at anu.edu.au](mailto:David.Martin@anu.edu.au)

Tue Sep 23 14:57:28 EST 2003

Colleagues

Over the past couple of days, I have had occasion to go through the AAS membership lists. This is because I've had to devise a means of emailing and mailing out the latest AAS Newsletter in time for important matters in it - a proposed revised code of ethics, the program for the forthcoming annual conference, and the draft agenda for the AGM - to be made available to members in a timely fashion.

What has perturbed me is that it is clear from the membership database, which also includes 'lapsed' and currently non-financial members, that there are many anthropologists in Australia who should be members of their national association, but are not--and that this includes some who are 'luminaries' of the profession. Why is this so? If this is because the AAS is not serving its membership well, or is essentially irrelevant to people's professional lives, then I suggest the lack of commitment, including by senior members of the profession, in part perpetuates the problem. Is it that the inherently rather idiosyncratic nature of the anthropological enterprise attracts individuals who are constitutionally ill-equipped for collective, or at least collegial, action? Is it that we are all so mired in the exigencies of our day to day lives that we just can't be bothered? Or might it be a reflection of our increasing irrelevance as a profession in the modern world? Of the competition from other disciplinary frameworks such as cultural or indigenous studies?

I'd welcome some robust debate on this in the period leading up to the conference, and indeed during it. I'd point people to the keynote address delivered by Annette Hamilton at last year's conference (available on the AAS web site), and also for those of you who are members of the Society to an article in the latest AAS Newsletter by Julie Finlayson, both of which make interesting commentaries on the state of the discipline in Australia.

David Martin

Thomas Reuter [thomasr at unimelb.edu.au](mailto:thomasr@unimelb.edu.au)

Wed Sep 24 10:33:18 EST 2003

Dear all,

I share David's sentiments about lapsed members and non-members.

Insofar as the problem is one of plain selfishness, I can't see any remedy other than to make it harder financially for anthropologists not to be members. Another option would be aim for complete professionalisation, which would mean registration would become a legal prerequisite for practicing as an anthropologist in Australia.

The first option has already been put into practice to some extent, and there are not many other opportunities left for creating financial disincentives for non-members. As for the second option, I think it would be incredibly difficult to generate support for this kind of initiative. We are not very comparable to doctors, though perhaps a little more so to psychologists, and both of these professions enforce compulsory registration. The aim in

their case may be to maintain a monopoly, but professional registration is also there to protect the public. These argument could be applied to anthropology. Not just anyone should be allowed to claim to be an anthropologist. And yes, malpractice is a possibility. I would like to hear members' opinions on this matter. Personally, as an academic anthropologist, I have no vested interest in taking such a step.

In the end, however, the important question for me is how the society can be relevant to its members.

The economic rationalist / minimalist response to a lack of relevance is to say, alright then, lets strip it back to the bare bones, and provide only the most essential services. I think that has happened in the past, and while it may have been useful in the short term I would argue that it is the wrong strategy in the long term.

The society has to have something of value to offer if we wish more people to join. Some steps have been taken in this direction. However, before I would consider going any further, it will be necessary to conduct some research in order to find out what anthropologists actually expect / don't expect from the society. The rest is then a matter of motivating people to invest money into achieving any objectives that are evidently worthwhile .

Sounds like a lot of work. Some people may put some work in out of the goodness of their hearts, for a little while. I do think, however, that we may need a professional executive (i.e. a salaried executive) if we really wanted to get things moving. Unfortunately, our membership may be too small or not committed enough to sustain a fully professionalised society.

Meanwhile, we try to do our bit.

Best regards Thomas Reuter President, Australian Anthropological Society

Margaret Trawick [trawick at clear.net.nz](mailto:trawick@clear.net.nz)

Wed Sep 24 13:13:49 EST 2003

Gack! Am I glad I am not in Australia! You say that a person with a postgraduate degree in anthropology should be barred from "practicing anthropology" (teaching? writing? doing research?) in Australia if they do not pay membership dues to the AAS? How crude! How mercenary! How pompous! Like they somehow owe it to you to pay dues to an organization that provides them only with "financial disincentives" for non-membership? I can't believe it! That attitude in itself would be enough to keep me from joining, even if I were living in your fair country. Did it ever occur to you that people are not joining up because they see no particular *benefits* of membership? Like interesting conversation among intelligent people? The paucity of such in the AAS is your problem, not theirs. Ordinarily, I eschew an excess of exclamation points, but you folks deserve a whole slew of them!!! So there!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Kind regards and best wishes,

Margaret

John Morton j.morton@latrobe.edu.au
Wed Sep 24 12:12:49 EST 2003

Oh dear! I see that AAS is attracting the wrong kind of people, with only a handful of dumbasses being prepared to pay through the nose to be in an organisation of persons with minimal IQs.

What a fool I've been!!!! I now wish I could live and work in New Zealand. The air over there is evidently much more conducive to intelligent conversation and debate.

Hey AASfolk! Why don't we all charter a liner and cross the Tasman right now and see if we can at last shape up.

Ttfn J

andrew.lattas at newcastle.edu.au andrew.lattas@newcastle.edu.au
Wed Sep 24 10:36:53 EST 2003

----- Forwarded message follows ----- From: Self <andrew.lattas@newcastle.edu.au>
To: "David F. Martin" <David.Martin@anu.edu.au>
Subject: Re: [AASNet] AAS membership Date sent: Wed, 24 Sep 2003

10:11:14 +1000

Colleagues, Many of us participate in the annual anthropology conference by organising sessions and giving papers but we refuse to become members because we are not happy with how the association is run by majority and the intellectual agendas they set. We resist by not becoming members whilst also running sessions in the annual conference that contain what we believe to be more relevant debates. The key-note speeches are not pointing to any solution to this problem but are in fact part of the problem. Until there are major reforms to the terms of the debate that are being set for us to consider, many of us will continue not to be members whilst at the same remaining active in other ways. It is a certain culture of patronage and parochialism that needs to be addressed.

regards Andrew Lattas

John Morton j.morton@latrobe.edu.au
Wed Sep 24 12:21:28 EST 2003

But what kind of reforms could possibly deal with the problems as set out here? What would the Lattas solution be? If the problem is that AAS is run by majority, maybe we could hand it over to a small clique. And would that stop patronage and parochialism? But I thought that's what cliques were all about. The only way to try to deal with any problems is to get in there and act in relation to them, not remain in splendid intellectual isolation and a few bucks a year better off.

michael allen mallen72@ozemail.com.au
Wed Sep 24 13:42:26 EST 2003

I totally endorse John's last comments. There is a quite distressingly arrogant tone in the complaints coming from the non-members!

Michael Allen

andrew.lattas at newcastle.edu.au andrew.lattas at newcastle.edu.au

Wed Sep 24 16:50:50 EST 2003

Colleagues, As the child of Greek migrants, I am sort of use to being told to go back to Greece if I am going to be so critical of Australia (and yes the comments were often given with the same mixture of humour and truth, and even by British migrants who had more right to belong to the nation despite their recent arrival). I have no intention of going to New Zealand and its fresh air or putting a stop to my participation in the AAS, simply because those who currently own and run the Australian anthropological organisation do not want to hear complaints or the reasons why people actively refuse to join. If you remember the start of the debate, it was the non-members who were being characterised as apathetic, as having lost their commitment to the discipline. I find that insulting, just like I do John Morton's suggestion that it is penny-pinching stinginess that underpins the reason why we do not join. What a convenient ideology, what a lovely cosy world that emerges from being able to displace people's motives into a crass materialism that exposes their true self and values - it is really all about money.

Give us a break.

Then there is the strategy of if you oppose an argument, the best thing to do is to distort the argument. So my criticism (which is also shared by many others) about the intellectual agendas being set at the AAS is converted into "a handful of dumbasses being prepared to pay through the nose to be in an organisation of persons with minimal IQs."

Well my reply, is do not ask or seek reasons why many of us are non- members, unless you do want to be told.

As it turns out the seeking of those reasons was just rhetorical, the question already implied its answer. The questioning was just a rhetorical device that already implied the answer of an organisational solution which others (Lesley Jolly and Margaret Trawick] have done a superb job of exposing and debunking.

Off to find some fresh air.

Andrew Lattas

David F Martin David.Martin at anu.edu.au

Wed Sep 24 17:47:15 EST 2003

Referring to Andres Lattas' latest posting, and to mine, I think it's plain silly to talk of "those who currently own and run the Australian anthropological organisation", and to state that they (we?) "do not want to hear complaints or the reasons why people actively refuse to join".

First, as I said earlier, the AAS is 'owned' by all its members - that's the legal structure of a voluntary association, which is what after all it is.

It is 'run' by its Executive, but their power is only over the affairs of the Society as a corporation, not over those of the profession. Even the Code of Ethics, currently being drafted for comment and consideration by the membership, is a voluntary code, not a mandatory one. Again, the AAS does not regulate the profession.

And where's the evidence for our not wanting to hear non-members' views? For goodness sake, this all came through a posting from me inviting debate on AASNet , which I administer, which is the internet list service for the profession, and which is open to all, AAS members or otherwise. Let's ensure that the 'robust debate' which I asked for has some sort of factual basis.

Andrew, I've gone back over the postings, and I can see no way that an inference could be drawn about your 'going back where you belong'. If anything, there was a potential imputed slight against our trans-Tasman colleague Margaret, not you! I think what's being asked is for us all to be more honest about where we are, not demands to go where you or anyone else belong.

Roll on the debate!!

Dave Martin

John Morton [j.morton at latrobe.edu.au](mailto:j.morton@latrobe.edu.au)

Thu Sep 25 10:30:20 EST 2003

Morning everybody.

Came to work this morning after leaving early yesterday to find another nice big flurry of emails amidst the uninvited junk mail offering me porn (the non-art gallery variety), viagra and refinancing. Tempted as I was, I rapidly junked the latter and studied the former. It seems to me that a number of things have been quite successfully dealt with and require little further comment. But I would like to add the following observations.

1. Peter Sutton's 'sad' comments might be somewhat apposite, but I think they might be too heavily conditioned by a sense of marginalisation. As was pointed out (by MT, I think) anthropology actually creates a lot of excitement still. Even if it were true that there are less of us engaged in Eureka!-style science these days (hard to judge exactly - and I certainly wouldn't want the definition of it narrowed to fit, as suggested by John Avery), anthropology is still largely a vocation in which life's big imponderables about 'humanity', 'society', 'culture', etc. can be brought fresh to every generation in the classroom. Fact is, in many regards, the more you know, the less you know; confusion is hence intrinsic and a fundamental part of what we do and communicate. That's exciting, energising.

And there is no better challenge than to communicate that energy and excitement to a bunch of students without losing site of the fact that it is possible to discover things in firm outline. Much is said about the 'applied' work we do, and the other research that we do. But for many of us, the main thing we do is teach - and that's where we get our buzz, and where we (hopefully) infect others with it.

2. Andrew Lattas's alleged(?) penny-pinching next. My original intention in regard to this was more humorous than substantive, but now let's deal with it as a substantive issue. It strikes me that the AAS question of non-membership is akin to the situation with unionism in the workplace. I think that it's pretty outrageous that people who pay nothing to a trade union gain the benefits that accrue from union workplace agreements (which they do). The non-members are, in effect, parasites. The situation in relation to AAS might not be quite so stark, but I think that there are marginal benefits for the discipline as a whole in the ongoing strength of AAS as an umbrella organisation. Those who wish to 'remain' parasitic on it are, of course, free to do so, but, frankly, I think it's pretty shabby, much as I think that anti-unionist legislation (giving people 'choice') over the past decade or so has been shabby.

3. Finally, I want to let people know that I'm unable to get to the AAS conference this year (much as I wish to be there). But I would like to float the following proposal for discussion at the AGM. I suggest that AAS revises its criteria for membership, introducing some new threshold tests. First, perhaps we could give potential members a comprehension test, getting them to read an AASnet posting and getting them to reply to it to see if they are actually capable of properly understanding what was written in the first place. I think this is a basic skill we should expect all professional anthropologists to have in decent measure. Second, I think we should introduce the ANTH card test. I have heard that the ANTH(hropological)H(umour) card test is a very reliable predictor of whether a human subject is capable of taking himself or herself too seriously, and even if he or she is incapable of genuine humour at all. As we all know, the academy does rather tend to breed humourless self-importance and it would be a shame if AAS membership skewed our profile in the same direction.

Margaret Trawick [trawick at clear.net.nz](mailto:trawick@clear.net.nz)

Wed Sep 24 17:07:09 EST 2003

As a complaining non-member, I guess I should reply. The activities of the AAS do not affect me immediately or directly. So in general I don't think it is my place to criticize them for their internal policies. But the suggestion that non-members be barred from practicing anthropology was quite alarming, and the tone of that message was ... well ... arrogant. And were I an anthropologist in Australia who did not get along with the AAS, I would find such a message threatening and possibly intimidating. New Zealand has its problems, and I am not saying that "we" are "better" than "you". And John's half-joking reply to my half-joking letter implicitly half-acknowledged that, I would like to think. But of course, in general, what happens in Australia does very much affect what happens in New Zealand, so if you were able to create and actually bring into effect such a radical exclusionary policy as was proposed in the letter I replied to, somehow or another the consequences would come round to us. So I considered it not inappropriate to raise my voice at that juncture.

Margaret

Dr Neale Draper [neale at achm.com.au](mailto:neale@achm.com.au)

Wed Sep 24 15:57:03 EST 2003

Hang on a minute - I missed out! Where do I sign up for my share of patronage and parochialism - I feel deprived somehow.

I did my graduate training overseas, and so don't have any overwhelming allegiances to any Academic Department or Institution. However, I am a practising anthropologist in a mid-size consulting firm, and AAS is the existing, national organisation for this field - and I take seriously the responsibility to hold membership in relevant professional bodies such as they are - and to seek to change aspects of them that concern me from the inside (where one can) rather than standing outside (where one can't).

Workload and financial constraints prevent me from attending every national conference, and at the moment preclude a more active membership role.

However, I would not consider not being a member of the national association - to keep better informed, to have my say when I want to/can find the time to, and to be able to say that I have signed up to a code of ethics that although not perfect is explicit and out there.

I suppose I could punish AAS's shortcomings (or the archaeology associations AAA and AACAI in which I also hold memberships) by withholding my esteemed membership, but this would achieve nothing more than the odd snigger (if anyone noticed at all), so I will continue to be a member, and hope to become better organised and more active in that membership.

Cheers

Neale Draper Dr Neale Draper MAACAI* Managing Director Senior Anthropologist & Archaeologist AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT Pty Ltd

Lesley Jolly l.jolly@staff.uqi.uq.edu.au

Wed Sep 24 12:10:01 EST 2003

Hear Hear! There simply isn't a good enough reason to be a member.

Anthropologists have no monopoly on social or cultural research and any talk of regulating such practice is ridiculous as well as pompous. I would hate to think it was symptomatic of an attitude that we are guardians of morals and ethics which I thought had long been sloughed off.

I very much second Andrew Lattas' comments also re the narrow range of activities and debate in AAS. Even the organisation of the conference is so unprofessional as to be really irritating. There are firms who do this kind of thing, if we can't do it ourselves! They would at least do ordinary things like making it possible to pay by card or purchase order and letting us meet the accounting and DEST requirements those of us in the detested academic sector have to live with.

So my question is, what would we want from a professionally run professional society? Here are a few things I see happening in other such organisations: 1. A high quality *refereed* conference stimulating real intellectual debate 2. connections to international networks of scholars in similar fields 3. promotion of funding/tendering/job opportunities across a range of activities 4. regularly updated web based resources/discusion

lists/publications 5. professional, anthropologically relevant insurance and legal advice where necessary and at a cost

I'm sure others will be able to add to this list. Naturally we would expect to pay higher yearly premiums to belong and higher registration costs for the conference, but that is the cost of doing professional business. An AAS that is an amateur undertaking is just not worth belonging to.

Lesley Jolly

Dr Lesley Jolly Behavioural Studies, School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences University of Queensland

Rosita Henry [Rosita.Henry at icu.edu.au](mailto:Rosita.Henry@icu.edu.au)
Wed Sep 24 13:07:38 EST 2003

How about a few more anthropologists out there broadening "the narrow range of activities and debate in AAS", and addressing dissatisfactions with "the intellectual agenda" of the Society by contributing occasionally to the Newsletter? Rosita (AAS Newsletter editor).

Dr Rosita Henry Head of Discipline (Anthropology) School of Anthropology, Archaeology and Sociology James Cook University Townsville 4811 Australia

Mark Hannah [Mark.Hannah at anu.edu.au](mailto:Mark.Hannah@anu.edu.au)
Wed Sep 24 16:09:06 EST 2003

Dear readers,

A tightening of AAS membership controls cuts against the grain of some desirable trends in the academy (non-anthropologists incorporating anthropological method). For instance, I am already prevented from joining the AAS because I do not hold the necessary qualifications. This is because I am trained in history. I call my method "historical anthropology", although I refer to myself as an "historian". Whilst I have no desire to call myself an anthropologist, I do desire to join and participate societies such as the AAS. I know many fellow doctoral students who are not anthropologists, but they are engaged in serious scholarship which employs anthropological methods. And I am not talking about dilettantish po-mo po-co non-sense. A lot of good quality collaborative work is being done across a few disciplines which one might call "discourses on the social". Anthropology and anthropological "subjects" are situated in a broader context. Rather than building membership fire-walls, the AAS could build a vital intellectual life by opening up a bit more.

M. Hannah

David F. Martin [David.Martin at anu.edu.au](mailto:David.Martin@anu.edu.au)
Wed Sep 24 16:32:56 EST 2003

Colleagues (whether AAS members or not, by choice or forgetfulness, etc ...). To make my original point clear, as a number of those who've contacted me directly or have put postings on AASNet seem to have misinterpreted me, I was not about making a membership drive for the society as such. What I was really alluding to was what I see as a correspondence between a malaise in the Society, and one in the profession more broadly. I am not sure that I've read anything on AASNet today which has persuaded me I was wrong.

But, to put my own oar in these troubled waters more directly, there are a number of divisions within this thing we call 'anthropology', and one of which I am particularly aware is that between the anthropology practised within the academy, and the 'applied' anthropology of the consultants and employees of government and indigenous agencies etc. As someone who has a foot in both camps to some extent, I can say that I am never in any doubt that the capacity of the discipline of anthropology to reproduce itself is of course dependent in large part upon a robust intellectual environment within the academy. However, this does not exist in isolation; for one thing, anthropology has to be able to speak to the circumstances of people's lives and passions to continue to attract students. The critical intellectual / analytic frameworks which anthropology students and postgraduates should develop in their time within universities are of course essential to good 'applied' work as well.

But, anthropology also has to offer career paths for it to remain viable - either in terms of actual jobs, or in terms of the development of people's own intellectual interests and frameworks in whatever it is that they do - or it will be seen as a dead end. Most people with anthropology degrees, or who have done some anthropology at a university, will not end up in the academy, and many will end up in the applied area of the profession. So, these two arenas of anthropological practice - in the academy, and outside it - are in my view necessarily co-dependent.

But, this co-dependency is all too often sneered at or dismissed from within the academy, where 'applied' work of various forms is seen, at best, as the poor cousin of 'real' anthropology. A necessary concern in the academy with rigour, lateral thinking, creativity, a regard to ethical and political issues, a concern with the major questions of human existence and so on, has sometimes resulted in pretentious, self-indulgent and elitist discourse and practice, with self-referencing debates conducted amongst ever-smaller groups of practitioners who thereby run the risk of disappearing, so to speak, up their own fundament(al principle)s.

I was particularly disturbed by Andrew Lattas' contribution, if I have correctly understood its rather opaque content, in which he outlined his reasons for refusing to become a member of the AAS while still taking part in the annual conference. The AAS is hardly 'run by majority'; while legally controlled ultimately by its members, its day-to-day affairs, mostly mundane, are under the control of an executive elected by the members. And these people (of whom I must state I am one) hardly form a cabal of thought police, but a group of mostly put-upon and rather unwilling anthropologists who feel they have an obligation to serve the profession through its only national association. Nor do they 'set' any 'intellectual agendas'. How the hell could they, even if they wanted to? Even annual conference themes, keynote speakers, and so on are determined by the hosting institution, not by the AAS.

And while I am talking of the annual conference, I thought Andrew's rationale for not joining the Society while still coming to the conference and organising sessions and giving papers was rather self-indulgent -- and in fact an instance of one of the options I offered in my original posting; we are such an idiosyncratic and self-absorbed bunch that we find it almost impossible to act collectively or collegially. After all, if there was no Society, there would be no conference. It's all very well to peer in at the poor unfortunates who choose to join -- and indeed, for some, to actively participate -- through the lattes-work of academic privilege, but not all of us are in that position, or want to be. I'd again point people to the article on the AAS web site by Annette Hamilton, and that in the most recent AAS Newsletter by Julie Finlayson, in regard to some of the fundamental challenges facing the profession.

Perhaps we can, in Levi-Straussian fashion, set up a dichotomy of 'joiners' and 'non-joiners', and assume that we are all one or the other. Lesley Jolly's statement that the organisation of the conference is unprofessional and suggestion of getting professionals to run it misses the point; how could a society with only a small percentage of eligible anthropologists actually joining (and paying fees) afford to do this, or indeed to run the kind of 'high-quality' conference she suggests?? I don't subscribe to the view that everyone who calls themselves an anthropologist should have to be a member of the Society -- but Thomas Reuter was not proposing this. He was however referring to a serious issue outside the academy in Australia, where there are a number of consultants who call themselves anthropologists on the basis of little formal training, and whose ethical and professional standards, in some cases, leave much to be desired. But there is a social and material infrastructure which supports the capacity of us all to engage in debates, exchange ideas, promulgate the discipline, offer mutual support and so forth, and this is maintained by those for whom collegiality and some sense of serving a wider public good is important. I think this is where the AAS has an important place. Even our ability to conduct debates on AASNet is dependent upon my colleague Alan Rumsey and myself as voluntary list administrators.

David Martin Anthropos Consulting and CAEPR, ANU

Margaret Trawick [trawick at clear.net.nz](mailto:trawick@clear.net.nz)

Thu Sep 25 00:48:19 EST 2003

I completely agree that if you attend a conference, you should have to pay a fee, and especially if you use the conference as a venue to present a paper or organize a session. This is just plain commonsense and common practice everywhere that I have heard of - except the AAS, only tonight I have learned. How else will the costs of organizing, renting the venue and so forth be paid for?

This is a slightly different issue from that of professionalization, which takes more careful thought to be sure, so one cannot simply oppose or support the idea in toto off the bat. I agree that before someone advertises himself or herself as an anthropologist, and is employed or offered payment for services on the basis of that claim, he or she must be able to present some serious credentials to prove the point. He or she should be liable for fraud if those credentials do not exist. And there should be some mandatory rules of practice - whether "practice" means teaching, research, or solving problems, finding information, and answering questions for private or government agencies. The nature of those mandatory rules will and should be the subject of much discussion, debate, and

research into what has and has not worked for others. Despite my casual way of writing on this list, I am not of the anything-goes school of thought when it comes to anthropology.

And I think that **anybody** should be allowed to **attend** an AAS conference, provided they pay the fee. **Presenters** should be chosen from among applicants by the conference organizers. Maybe some of them will not be anthropologists, but people in other disciplines or representing other groups who have something of value to say to anthropologists. **Voters** should be professional anthropologists with credentials, who have also paid the fee to attend the conference. **Students** should receive some recognition, have some voice, and be involved in the organization and administration of conference. There may be a sliding scale of fees, with reduced fees for students. That is just my suggestion.

Refereed papers and refereed publications of proceedings would also be good. Maybe have one category of refereed and one category of non-refereed, to make for more diversity.

A final suggestion - and this comes from someone who has never been to an AAS conference and therefore is entirely ignorant of what actually happens there - is make it possible for people to have **fun** at the conference. Give a show, throw a party, cook up a wonderful dinner, whatever. Advertise just a little bit, modestly, but intelligently and funly (I just now made up that last word). Slowly, word will go round that attending the AAS conference is *de rigueur* for those who love life and humanity.

All of this will take a whole lot of work by a whole lot of people, and I know it is easy to say what other people should do. But if you are looking for ideas, here are mine, and the absolute final ones for tonight (oops, this morning). Now, I **have** to write that lecture.

Best, Margaret

Victoria Heathcote [victoria_heathcote at iprimus.com.au](http://victoria_heathcote_at_iprimus.com.au)
Wed Sep 24 18:19:32 EST 2003

Dear members and non-members alike,

It is with bemusement and trepidation that I follow this debate and, certainly, the swell of devil-may-care bellicosity has done little to soundly ground discussion. Nevertheless, I would like to offer the following comment:

If AAS membership concerns reflect the increasing irrelevance of anthropology in the modern world, then a greater - not lesser - degree of professionalisation and collective concord is crucial for its survival.

Indeed, thought given to the strategic long-term interests of the discipline must not preclude the possibility of full professionalisation.

This of course entails restrictions on membership and practice, and so it must. But what cost the collective quality and reputation of anthropologists and anthropology without

such restrictions? Accusations of arrogance, pomposity or radical exclusionism in response to the possibility of increased or full professionalisation are indicative of short-termism and a misplaced libertarianism that services immediate individual, not lasting, collective ends.

Sincerely,

V. Heathcote

Margaret Trawick [trawick at clear.net.nz](mailto:trawick@clear.net.nz)

Wed Sep 24 22:45:35 EST 2003

Dear All,

I should be writing my lecture for tomorrow, but this is more fun. I just want to ask here that we not assume an "increasing irrelevance of anthropology to the modern world" - whoever introduced that thought into this discussion. Anthropology is totally alive and well and doing better than ever in the modern world, and if there is malaise or apathy or whatever in some corners, we are ill-informed and ill-advised to blame it on the discipline as a whole. I am too tired to find the figures now, but they have been found, and students are flocking to anthropology classes both here and in North America, like they never did before. This is not because anthropology offers better job prospects than any other liberal arts discipline, for it certainly doesn't, but because it is exciting and interesting and, yes, relevant. For the people of today, it is right on the mark. It is *cool*. More cool by far than poco (which, btw, should not be dismissed as useless, because it does appeal to those who enjoy reading good current English-language novels, and has given English departments a nice boost up). Anthropology is both cooler and hotter because it is wider and deeper and more open to possibilities than anything else you can devote your life to.

And it is not just Anglophone-types like us who see it that way. A few of you reading this may have been at the ICAES in Florence in July, and whereas the Florentians did not exactly organize everything with impeccable care, in fact they did a horrible job, an exciting thing about the conference was the strong participation of Chinese delegates, who went all-out to prove that they wanted anthropologists in China for the next ICAES in 2008. The clincher of it all was when the one leading young Chinese delegate told the audience, "China *needs* anthropology!" This group, though they never whispered a word about this, quite clearly had the full unconditional support of the government of the PRC, not just mouth but money to pay for all these delegates and arrange this far in advance an amazing venue and array of facilities for this conference that they were not even assured of being permitted to host. So much was impressive at least to naive little me.

Competing against the PRC for the vote to win the privilege of hosting the next ICAES in their home country was our own Australia. And I had been all ready to support Australia's bid for this privilege until I learned that China had also thrown its hat into the ring. Having been to the Beijing Inter-Congress a few years previously, I already knew how much China was willing to give and do to make visiting anthropologists happy, and that was heaps. The Australian delegates did a creditable job in presenting their case, stressing words like "intellectual" and "professional" and a video show with a slogan

something like "Brisbane is happening!" (excuse me but ... *wince* .. not wincing at Brisbane but wincing at the slogan). (And I think it was maybe a bit impolitic to hint that Australians offer more in the way of intellect than Chinese). China won the vote of the enthusiastic audience of delegates from all over the world hands down.

So, the point of this is, don't blame anthropology for being generally irrelevant, because it certainly is nothing like that, nor does it present that appearance to the world at large. And don't blame the fact that China is way more powerful than Australia. You could have won if you had played your cards differently, or more precisely and bluntly, if you had been playing with a full deck, which you weren't. I am not saying you don't have a full deck, I am saying you were not using it. You had carefully chosen a few cards to play, you were not taking any chances. And you lost.

Something sad has happened to anthropology in Australia. I don't know how or why or even what, exactly, but I am a relative newcomer to this part of the world, and still have much to learn. But you are saying it yourselves: something sad has happened. The AAS, which should be vibrant and thriving, is struggling just to survive. It doesn't seem to me, as an outsider, that an absence of professionalism is the problem. Maybe a failure of confidence? A fear that you may lose something as yet unnamed? Just guessing

And wishing you well,

Margaret

Thomas Reuter thomasr@unimelb.edu.au

Thu Sep 25 13:16:06 EST 2003

Dear Margaret and all,

I could not agree more. Anthropology is as relevant now as it ever has been, if not more so, in Australia and everywhere else. By which I mean --- highly relevant.

In fact, I think we have such a contribution to make to public debates on contemporary issues (such as the politicization of culture and religion in recent global and local conflicts) that it would be a great shame if we should fail to do so, either individually or as a group.

This is one reason why I believe it may be good if the society could on occasion stand up and say: this is a job anthropologists are best qualified to do or an issue anthropologists are best qualified to comment upon (providing they are indeed qualified anthropologists). Every other discipline does that to some extent.

How we can achieve that, how far should we go -- all that is completely open to debate.

The job of an executive is not to restrict or control such a debate but to respond to its outcomes.

I would especially invite applied anthropologists to come forward and express their thoughts on professionalization. Is the current system working? Is there a need for

regulation (in a form that would serve the interest of every honest practitioner)? Is there some other, easier and more obvious, less controversial solution?

Cheers Thomas

Mark Hannah [Mark.Hannah at anu.edu.au](mailto:Mark.Hannah@anu.edu.au)

Thu Sep 25 16:16:14 EST 2003

Dear Readers, Instead of taking afternoon tea, I pasted together the following info on membership criteria for the Australian peak discipline specific organisations in the general area of social enquiry Archaeology, Political Science, History, Human Geography, Sociology, Demography, Linguistics and Anthropology. Of these, only the AAS excludes from its membership persons not trained in the discipline to which it pertains. Whilst I abhor untrained folk masquerading as anthropologists, I simply do not understand why only anthropologists may join the AAS. Anthropologists are welcome to join the peak body of practically every other discipline in the general area of social enquiry. Why is the Society such a close shop given the importance of multidisciplinary work both within and outside of the academy flagged by several of the contributors to this debate?

M. Hannah

Dr Neale Draper [neale at achm.com.au](mailto:neale@achm.com.au)

Thu Sep 25 16:55:42 EST 2003

In response to Mark's posting - I think it would be disastrous to include non-anthropologists (although there are some already) as AAS members, unless there is a non-anthropologist category developed as well. Otherwise this would increase the problem of non-anthropologists masquerading as consultant anthropologists in particular, which already is rife in the heritage and native title areas and causing many practical problems that reflect negatively on the reputation of our discipline.

Mark is incorrect with respect to Archaeology at least - AAA (Australian Archaeology Association) is explicitly an association for archaeologists, students, and interested persons in general - not a disciplinary or professional association (which I understand AAS to be). There is a separate professional body for the large number of consultant archaeologists - AACAI (Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists, Inc). That separation of the two organisations is a matter of historical accident rather than design. The important point is that there should be no possible confusion with regards to a professional membership of qualified people compared to membership involving interested, non-qualified people, even if these are just separate categories (clearly identified) in the same society/association. However mixing them up poses a serious danger to Australian anthropology, because the ambiguity will be exploited by unscrupulous people, like it or not. To my mind, AAS also is the major means available at a national level for anthropologists to keep in touch and to act as a discipline and a profession when needed (eg developing a code of ethics, holding an annual conference, publishing a newsletter and journal, and of course maintaining an internet dialogue for those who want more than just an extension of their local CES Job Network) - it is central to the maintenance of OUR cultural identity as anthropologists in Australia.

Regards to all

Neale Draper

Thomas Reuter [thomasr at unimelb.edu.au](mailto:thomasr@unimelb.edu.au)

Thu Sep 25 17:17:36 EST 2003

Hello Mark

thank you very much for compiling this list of extracts, which does make me think there may be some room for change.

In principle the idea that non-anthropologists should be allowed to join the society if they have a general interest in anthropology, academic or otherwise, is not such a bad idea at all. Perhaps a special category could be created for people like that, though with restricted rights.

My only reservation is that I am not sure whether there is in fact sufficient demand out there? I think there may be or could be, and if there is, it could help to raise our public profile as a profession to invite broader participation.

The executive should discuss this proposal.

Regards Thomas

Jeremy Beckett [jbeckett at mail.bigpond.com](mailto:jbeckett@mail.bigpond.com)

Wed Sep 24 18:57:57 EST 2003

I find Andrew Lattas's attack on AAS depressing and perplexing. Being a refusnik he seems not to know how our conferences are assigned or planned.

There is nothing to stop Newcastle offering to host the next conference, and setting all the agendas it wants to. But in reality what agenda does any conference committee set? I am not aware that any proposal has ever been refused. Even Andrew and his gallant resisters can come down from the hills and discuss any topic they want. Obviously to attract enough people a conference has to cater for a range of interests, many of which neither Andrew nor I might share, but does he want to police what gets discussed.

In any case, I'm left unclear what it is Andrew and his friends want; his criticisms are totally non-specific. What would he like conferences to be discussing? What exactly is it we are missing? Tell us, we might even agree with you - or wouldn't we even understand?

Maybe we do need to have the conferences professionally organised, particularly now that funds are short and academics pressed; however the complaint about the present arrangements (Lesley Jolly) comes a bit rich from a department that hasn't hosted a conference in twenty years. Of course the conference fee will go up, but we are still just about the cheapest show in academe. A sign of low self esteem? I understand the

sociologists pay \$400. Maybe that would make us decide whether we really wanted a conference at all.

Jeremy Beckett

Francesca Merlan francesca.merlan@anu.edu.au

Wed Sep 24 21:16:20 EST 2003

Thanks to Jeremy Beckett for suggesting we clarify what the problem(s) is/are.

Andrew, please tell us what you meant. Also, it was clearly a simple error when you (Andrew) said AAS was run by 'majority'; surely you meant 'minority'? And so perhaps Dave Martin was right in his understanding of what this referred to. However, I'd rather not guess. Plain speaking please, we can all take it from there.

Thomas, I'd like to ask exactly what you meant when you said it might be necessary 'to make it harder financially for anthropologists not to be *members*'. *You went on to explain it a bit, but it was still not entirely clear to me. You also said, 'Another option' (or is this the same option?) would be to aim for complete professionalisation, which would mean 'registration would become a legal prerequisite for practicing as an anthropologist in Australia'.*

Without your having any real control over how briefs and consultancies are written, and also no complete say in the matter of university re-structurings, how in the world would this work? In the world of consultancies and applied work, hiring agencies are often happy with a generic 'social scientist'. I think we would have relatively few powers of persuasion over them. We have to show what we can do that offers insight.

And we have to accept, I think and as Dave Martin already suggested, that we must be creatures of both the academy as well as the world beyond (but not separate from) it.

Francesca

James Innes j.innes@qbrmpa.gov.au

Thu Sep 25 10:51:18 EST 2003

The point made by Francesca Merlan about anthropology offering other insight as to what it can do as distinct from the generic offerings of the social sciences is an important one and should be considered in the context of how the AAS can organise to lead and promote the application of anthropology in an applied context. Importantly too it should also be the academy that provides support in terms of training and intellectual and theoretical development to stimulate and support progress in the applied arena. In my view a professional society such as AAS has a critical role in providing leadership in both the applied and academic domains.

In my situation in terms of academic standing I am a PhD candidate in anthropology in the final write up stage, in an applied context I manage the social science research and monitoring program for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. From my experience there is a real need for the insights anthropology can offer communities and government in managing our marine and terrestrial environments and I use the example

of environmental management to illustrate the need for the society to provide such leadership.

All too often I see marine scientists, and those trained in other natural sciences undertaking initiatives and developing policy that would benefit from anthropological expertise. Moreover with the greater focus now on community involvement in Natural Resource Management the social side of NRM is seen as critical and potentially there are many opportunities for anthropologists to be involved. In Queensland for example Commonwealth funding for the National Action Plan for Salinity with NHT has led to the formation of regional catchment based community boards administering multi-million dollar budgets. These community boards have identified that information about understanding community relationships with the environment and processes to develop new institutional arrangements for achieving NRM outcomes is critical. This one example presents as a very ripe area for investment in the expertise and insight anthropology can offer. In the marine context, issues to do with fisheries management, Indigenous hunting and community involvement in marine planning are crying out for input from anthropology. The challenge is that government policy for environmental management is largely configured by people with some form of training in the natural sciences. In most cases it is assumed that the only science needed for environmental management is natural. At present for example Australia's National Oceans Office is developing regional plans for Australia's ocean areas and the science and policy for that come from people with a natural science frame of reference. Despite this senior bureaucrats and other people in agencies such as mine are now realising the value of the social sciences (even if my social science team is outnumbered by my natural science colleagues 6 to 2). The problem I see from the side of the academy is that anthropology in Australia has in the main not sought to find prime relevance for itself in fields such as environmental management despite the efforts of individuals and has eschewed training students to consider how they can apply anthropological training to a broader range of career paths.

At present the social science realm of the environmental management arena, in terms of the policy formulation and leadership seems to be dominated by economists, generic social scientists and natural scientists who have had "road to Damascus conversions". From my perspective the academy is not training future anthropologists to work in areas such as this and there is no clear leadership from either the academy or elsewhere about what roles/services anthropology can provide in the environmental arena. I believe that a professional body such as AAS has a role and one of the reasons I renewed my lapsed membership was to make a contribution to that end. As Francesca says anthropologists need to be part of both worlds and I see that AAS provides the opportunity for unity to organise and lead the discipline across a range of areas where anthropological input would add considerable value.

cheers James

David F Martin David.Martin.at.anthropos.com.au

Thu Sep 25 07:14:23 EST 2003

Peter Sutton, currently in London, asked me to post this contribution to the AASNet debate.

I do think the point about there being now a certain sadness in the Australian branch of anthropology is correct. It may to some extent be related to ex-colonial/fourth world empowerment and subsequent disenchantment with the liberation role of anthropology, even perhaps disenchantment with those who were once merely studied and who now can call the shots, sometimes in ways we don't like. But this is also an era when there is little left of a 'scientific discovery' paradigm that once provided the competitive stimulus and 'eureka' features of being in a profession that saw itself as advancing a body of reliable knowledge that had public standing. To the extent that the intellectual project is more circular than accretive, and more self-oriented than collaborative/competitive, it seems natural for us to lack direction as a group. Our self-regard and coherence have been damaged, and I suspect these are among the reasons why.

Peter Sutton

John.Avery at nt.gov.au [John.Avery at nt.gov.au](#)

Thu Sep 25 08:55:18 EST 2003

If there is a sense of malaise in anthropology along the lines Peter Sutton suggests, I nevertheless think that there is some scope for optimism. The despondent circularity, which I take to mean repetitiveness, I associate with the legacy of cultural relativism, which is still a pervasive ethos in the discipline. Like other varieties of scepticism, cultural relativism is fairly infantile intellectually, but therein lies its emotional grip. It certainly stalls the scientific ambition, since the 'scientific paradigm' is just one among many.

The future of anthropology surely lies in recovering its claims to be a natural science integrated with the other natural science, rather than being a sui generis cultural science or a branch of phenomenology. But is the academic branch of the discipline willing to and equipped to make such a transition?

John Avery

John.Avery at nt.gov.au [John.Avery at nt.gov.au](#)

Thu Sep 25 11:26:39 EST 2003

John Morton wrote, inter alia:

I certainly wouldn't want the definition of it narrowed to fit, as suggested by John Avery, anthropology is still largely a vocation in which life's big imponderables about 'humanity', 'society', 'culture', etc. can be brought fresh to every generation in the classroom.

My view that anthropology be recovered as a natural science project is far from narrowing - it certainly did not restricts Freud's valuation of phenomenological data, not that I have much lingering sentiment for psychoanalysis. I suggest in place of the aporia of relativism and other 'imponderables' (whereof we might not speak, as LW said) we reorient on the broader basis of biological, demographic, medical, geographic studies in the scientific tradition. Maybe then we need not burden each generation with the same round of wondrous insolubles.

John Avery

David F. Martin David.Martin@anu.edu.au
Thu Sep 25 11:31:08 EST 2003

Colleagues, Andrew Lattas has asked me to post this response, as he is currently away from his normal AASNet-subscribed email address.

----- Original Message ----- From: Dr Andrew Lattas To: aasnet@anu.edu.au Sent: Thursday, September 25, 2003

9:45 AM Subject: AAS Membership & ProfessionalisationM

Margaret, My suspicion is that a certain culture of professionalism is also the problem though it is seen to be the solution (which is not to say that we should become unprofessional). Within the AAS, this pursuit of a culture of professionalism has often become a substitute and a gloss for academic excellence and debate as well as the criteria for academic advancement. The professionalisation of the AAS is being driven partly by anthropological consultancy which has been increasingly capturing the intellectual agenda of the AAS (and occasionally the organisation itself). Though Lindy Warrell positions herself as the morally righteous territorial voice of that push into the AAS, I suspect her below absurd demand is just hers (but this is more a wish on my part than anything else)

I find it puzzling that non-paying members are encouraged by the society to organise conference sessions - by whose authority?? This is tantamount when you think about it, to jo off the street organising sessions. Isn't it? If the society is not a professional body, then why indeed [do] to we pay membership? (Lindy Warrell)

To clarify, I do pay my conference fees, though it is true that as a postgraduate student I did once sneak into an AAS conference without paying, I am sorry for that.

My response to the "lazy apathy" view of non-members was to point out that many of us non-members have been actively involved in caring for the discipline, we have not been shirking but having been involved in conferences. Yet this has generated a sense of outrage: "how dare you be so self-indulgent as to want to organise a session and give a paper"; or "not being a member is equivalent to being Jo off the street". It does not matter that you have a PhD anthropology, a book, articles and research grants, where is your authority, where are your official documents proving that you are not from New Zealand anthropology

I was suggesting an alternative interpretation of non-membership not as a passive apathy but as active dissatisfaction and resistance to a structure; an intellectual structure whose agendas are set up through key note speakers, plenary sessions and the organising of conference sessions. Maybe letting the host university organise everything is not ideal, maybe another structure of checks and balances is needed to create more accountability and responsibility for the vision of anthropology that the conference will produce. Maybe more international speakers who are working in interesting and new ways could be used to organise sessions and keynote addresses, maybe the problem is the selection of names.

The response to my reinterpretation of active non-membership has been to draw forth the usual parody of the resistance model which has never been properly understood by many of the senior scholars within Australian Aboriginal anthropology. Indeed they still regard it with disdain and dismiss it as romantic leftist longing for a Robin Hood. The work of Genovese and James Scott though cited is not understood, instead the confused introduction of David Trigger's *Whitefella comin'* book is rolled out to warn of the dangers of studying and acknowledging resistances .

There seems to be also a confused response to my critique of the intellectual agendas or the lack of them that have characterised so many AAS conferences. On the one hand I am accused of saying that a small cabal runs the AAS when it is really being run democratically by the members, who are also said not to want to participate. On the other hand I am accused of saying that a certain dominant majority is in charge which has made change almost impossible. I actually do not believe the two positions are opposed but I tend to lean more towards the latter.

I deliberately used the word majority because I believe my position to be that of a significant and active minority in the discipline which has been attending AAS conferences for a long time now and yet feels dissatisfied and alienated from the debates.

As for Margaret's point about a lack of confidence in Australian anthropology, that was very much demonstrated in the recent email debates about Ron Brunton. There the fear and cowardly retreat of the anthropologists in relationship to a very good newspaper exposure of Brunton's politics was embarrassing to witness.

regards Andrew Lattas

Deane Fergie deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au

Thu Sep 25 12:40:46 EST 2003

Colleagues, I too am enjoying the debate (at long last I must say) - and John's humour. Thankyou Jonno.

But the debate it seems to me demonstrates that its one or more of us started to work on a history of Australia's Anthropology. I'll put money on the idea that our contemporary cleavages (and mine is better than most I'll warrant) have 'evolved' from some earlier ones - its time to talk about them too. So I'd like to encourage some long standing anthropologists 'in Australia' (as well as 'of Australia') to give us some glimpses of the past politics of association amongst Australia's anthropologists - analytic as well as anecdotal if possible.

Let me start the ball rolling with a memory I have of hearing Dawn Ryan (somewhat under the influence of a Cooper's or two, and I'd guess at an AAS conference) waxing lyrical about the big coup when young bloods established the AAS and thwarted the hegemony of the old Sydney/Perth professors (in particular) and their (the pipe puffing professors and keepers of large professional gates) filial relationship to the (British) ASA. Is my memory right? / was Dawn telling the truth? Who were these young upstarts? What were their motivations? How did the old men respond? Was this only possible because it happened at the time when Anthropology was expanding radically in Oz and unfencable Departments opening around in places like Monash, Macquarie,

FAculties ANU, Adelaide and so on? How did the young blood professorite associate themselves and their departments?

It seems to me then that the establishment of AAS might tell us more about traditions of resistance and nationalism (thankyou Andrew) ... of differences between elites and egalitarians (not that I want to put this back into dualisms, But I do acknowledge the Kapferer factor).

Certainly, in my own time, the on-going (though sometimes only implicit) debate between AAS as open 'learned society' and 'professional body' seem to carry through an earlier heritage.

But we need some accounts... how about it Jeremy and Micahel and...

regards Deane

Dr Deane Fergie Anthropology University of Adelaide South Australia 5005

frances.claffey [frances.claffey at telstra.com](mailto:frances.claffey@telstra.com)

Thu Sep 25 14:20:08 EST 2003

I was called a "native title hack" at the Adelaide AAS conference in 1996 (was it?). From that day forward I've considered myself an "applied anthropologist" - to some, this label is just as good an insult. I get the impression, or have had the impression for a number of years, that if one gets their hands dirty doing native title they lose any hope of being considered "professional". The other thing that seeps through to the surface appears to be the that the bosses in AAS are or have been from this applied end and this is not cool to those who don't want to join. Sorry for the lack of big words, but I've gone a little bit feral since leaving uni.

I have a question. I only have an honours degree - no real intention of doing a PhD. Can I call myself an anthropologist? I've been pretending to be one for years, fending off Archaeologists, linguists, lawyers and others, who think they're better at it than me - are they? I don't think they are because I know in my professional heart of hearts, that the other mob, in their ivory castles at uni, are my source of support, guidance, wisdom, etc. The folk at the uni keep me honest - and keep me professional. Its these parents and grandparents that allow me to know who I am and what family I belong to. I get to take shelter in your libraries and take comfort in their company. I'm still learning from them.

I think a lot of this debate is about native title work. I haven't seen anyone name it in the flow of discussion. Don't forget how new it is and that its not the problem. Neither are people who work in this field the problem. Is anthropology a profession, discipline or social science? Do we need an inward-looking professionalism or are we talking about anthropologists being confused with other ologists?

I was told a story recently about how an unqualified person wanting to work as an anthropologist was told they just needed to join the AAS. This argument was eventually defeated on the basis that you couldn't fly a plane if you joined a flying club. You still would need a pilot's licence. I desperately want to NOT have to justify myself and other anthros as being appropriately qualified in the face of pretenders (or distant relations).

At the same time, I want an answer to my question - am I able to call myself an anthropologist?

I look forward to some feedback.

Margaret Trawick [trawick at clear.net.nz](mailto:trawick@clear.net.nz)

Thu Sep 25 14:54:27 EST 2003

----- Original Message ----- From: Dr Andrew Lattas To: Margaret Trawick Sent: Thursday, September 25, 2003

12:03 PM Subject: Fw: AAS Membership & ProfessionalisationM

Margaret, this is bouncing from my home office account, is it possible for you to forward this on. It is addressed to you

regards Andrew

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regards Andrew Lattas

John Morton [J.Morton at latrobe.edu.au](mailto:J.Morton@latrobe.edu.au)

Thu Sep 25 16:33:57 EST 2003

On the Avery tab: Go natural science! But why do we need to recover what was never really lost? Then again, science doesn't answer every question, nor pose them all. Anthropology can be natural science and manifestly is in many people's hands - some of the time or all of the time, depending on the practitioner. It can also be bad science and good science, again depending on the moment. It can also be ostensibly science when it isn't. Maybe we should have more scientists among us.

Maybe we should do a bit more science even if we don't mainly locate ourselves there. However, we do need to resist the tendency of a particular brand of science - the evangelical kind that says it alone has all the right questions and all the right answers to

boot. This is why I find the dismissive and Manichean Avery tone (good old science opposing everything else) a wee bit worrying.

Btw: it was Freud who taught me all about megalomania in the name of scientific reason! It is, of course, a narrowness of vision that makes a megalomaniac see one big picture and think he or she is therefore broad-minded.

Btw 2: I was once asked in court (in the so called Stolen Generation case) if anthropology was a science. My answer? 'That is not a settled question'. Mr Douglas Meagher, a good positivist sort of soul not usually noted for his kindly disposition in court, seemed happy enough with the answer. For reasons stated above, I think I prefer the question to remain not settled.

John Morton

Julie Finlayson [Julie.Finlayson at aiatsis.gov.au](mailto:Julie.Finlayson@aiatsis.gov.au)
Thu Sep 25 16:42:35 EST 2003

I can't resist joining in with my tuppence worth! I really haven't had so much fun or enjoyed following such a lively discussion for yonks ! And the laughs! What is wonderful about it all is the point Ludger made- the capacity of such ferment to motivate and entice people to become members! Fantastic!

The points I'd like to make concern the structure and operation of AAS as there seems to be a great deal of confusion and ignorance about these matters. To begin, AAS operates with an exclusive structure. I say this on the basis of the following points [most of them verifiable because enshrined in the AAS constitution for our incorporation and conduct].

First, contrary to the fears of some, AAS is not run by a 'minority' since any paid up member can stand for election and all executive positions are open to nomination and election every year. Ahh.. but here is the rub: how much competition is there for such positions? I have always participated in AAS on the assumption [and assumed that others might too] that if there are things you don't like, you get involved to help make change. In fact to let you all into a secret, such is the incapacity for AAS membership [and non-members] to act collectively outside the focus provided by the annual conference that it is in fact quite easy to do things and make changes. As Margaret Mead said [quoting from my desk calendar]

'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: indeed it is the only thing that ever has'.

Moreover, I have never understood the complaints about one mob dominating another in AAS when the structure is sufficiently flexible that all sorts of opportunities exist to be active, to contribute and to help set agendas, if you are interested. But I will say that there are a lot of armchair activists who whinge about what others are doing [or not doing] while not getting up and having a go themselves. And I am also aware that there is a destructive predisposition amongst the collectivity....the status of the AAS is as much a reflection of its membership as it is of the Australian anthropological collectivity.

Second, the location of the annual conference arises from a decision discussed, negotiated and reached between the heads of departments each year at the annual

meeting. The process is that people put up their hand on behalf of their university mindful of their capacity to host the event, to fund and to provide human resource support. The decision is not captured by an elite. Indeed it is open to any university whose department is willing to take on the workload. That is why the location and host rotates- so come in UQ and Newcastle and offer to put on a conference. I can also remember years when deliberate decisions were made to go to WA and North QLD in order to give those States a rest from the travel costs involved in always going south or east.

The third point for an inclusive process is evident in the conference program- there is generally something for everyone, for all areas of the discipline. In fact, think about the process for the call for sessions.

This is not dominated or shaped by a nameless elite- although certainly each host gets a chance to put their stamp on the conference theme.

Calls for session presenters then goes out and in turn, they call for individual presenters. So how a specific agenda gets to dominate isn't exactly clear to me.

Personally, I think the idea of checks and balances and greater accountability with cut-off dates for expressions of interest by presenters and so forth is probably a good idea. But who is going to put up their hand to design and implement and monitor such a process? And frankly, as a paid-up member of an association I think I might be very concerned if non-members were monitoring for accountability- so Andrew join up, get involved and I think you'll find there will be a place for you to activate your ideas and visions for the conference.

However, I also want to point out that while visions are crucial for providing focus and direction in an organisation, at present AAS is struggling with more basic issues; for example, apathy, poor membership numbers, insufficient interest to have contested annual executive elections, members who are so indifferent they don't know whether in fact they are current members or not, and poor turn-outs when a group such as the Clearing House opens new professional and personal development opportunities for people. In other words we need the human infrastructure to implement the vision. We also need to understand how the system operates- that there is a connection between membership, funds, and a capacity to act in providing opportunities and professional support and advocacy.

Julie Finlayson

Lesley Jolly [l.jolly at staff.uqi.uq.edu.au](mailto:l.jolly@staff.uqi.uq.edu.au)

Thu Sep 25 17:01:18 EST 2003

I swore to myself I wouldn't say anymore on this debate but as the only member of Uq to have contributed so far I feel I need to respond to Julie's post.

I agree that it has been great to see so much discussion and it indicates how passionate we all are about being practicing anthropologists of whatever persuasion. So why doesn't that translate into active involvement in AAS? Contrary to the assumptions of previous posters I am in fact a member, unsatisfactory as I find that to be. Like everyone

else, I am struggling with a very heavy workload and demands to publish only where it counts. I am a member of the international sociological association as well as the society for applied anthropology as well as the american society for engineering education (but that's another story). I make the time to have some input to those societies, at least to the extent of periodically checking their web pages and reading the very good journals they produce and post to me for the price of my membership. Sadly, I don't get that service from AAS. it's all very well to say that if we don't like it we should change it but we need to have an incentive to care enough to change it, remembering the very difficult environment we all work in.

Apropos the conference organising issue, I am not in an anthropology department and indeed at UQ there are more anthropologists outside of the anthropology department than there are in it. So how representative is the head of department session for us? How do we organise a conference? Well, of course it could be done and it could be done to meet DEST funding requirements for those of us constrained in that way. I'm even willing to take a lead on organising it (and I'm going to regret saying that) BUT not without knowing that a substantial number of other Brisbane base anthros would be there helping. Can AAS help me to do that? Can I even make the offer (not being a head of an anthro department)?

As Deane has pointed out some of these arguments have very long histories.

Perhaps a first step to rejuvenating AAS is to find out just where all the anthros in Australia are today, what sort of work they are doing, and what kind of support they need from their professional society.

Lesley

Dr Lesley Jolly Behavioural Studies, School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences University of Queensland

Thomas Reuter thomasr@unimelb.edu.au

Thu Sep 25 17:24:18 EST 2003

Dear readers,

I welcome all the interest my earlier message has generated.

Just to set the record straight, however, I would like to stress that I was not proposing anything at all, I was simply outlining a range of available possibilities for this organization by pointing at the extreme ends of two basic scales:

1) amount of services provided (minimalist vs excessive)

I suggested that, in my opinion, we need to provide services that accurately reflect members' needs rather than over- or under-servicing.

2) degree of cohesion (highly cohesive and interventionist vs not cohesive and non-interventionist)

This second point may need some clarification.

Annette Hamilton, in last year's keynote, drew a similar comparison with other professions and professional organizations, most notably in the medical field. The AMA, for example, is extremely cohesive and effective at protecting members' shared interests, but it is also highly interventionist. The doctors' argument is that the public must be protected from quacks, who might kill rather than cure their patients. I indicated that I suspect there are also other reasons, more to do with the maintenance of a professional monopoly on medical services.

In my opinion, the AMA approach is definitely not one we should or could ever emulate.

Nevertheless, it is good to reflect about what the AMA and other professional bodies are in fact doing, and why.

In the end it all seems to boil down to organizations protecting the common interests of their members (and that only works provided there are indeed common interests), and within reason, there is nothing necessarily wrong with that. Taken too far, of course, such activities may become monopolistic and exclusionary, and that is no longer in the public interest.

We are so very very far removed from such a scenario... Anthropologists tend to lack a clear sense of what their common interests may be, and this can make it difficult for us, for example, to lobby governments where perhaps we should (eg. to ensure our students are not bound by inappropriate PhD completion schedules which fail to take account of fieldwork). It also means we have no mechanism as a profession to protect the integrity of the profession. Instead, we leave it to the agencies who employ anthropologists to decide who is qualified.

Why would such boundary-keeping exercises matter?? In an academic context, interdisciplinary openness is indeed something to be encouraged. The implications of "openness" are not the same in applied anthropology, however, where cases of malpractice are conceivable and could conceivably cause a lot of harm, most notably to indigenous Australians. Surely, from this perspective, a total laissez faire approach does not seem right either?! Again, the matter of defining professionalism is left to others to decide, namely the courts, in the case of Native Title issues. Note that the issue here is not disciplinary boundaries but standards of professionalism. Do we need some kind of standard? Is there any point having standards if they can not be enforced?

These are all very thorny issues, and nothing much has changed for a long time, because it is so hard to build a consensus under these circumstances. I certainly do not see any easy solution and am undecided as to what would be a happy medium approach in this case.

Be that as it may, I think anthropology is about participation, about understanding a society "from the inside".

In this sense, if there are any anthropologists outside the AAS who really do want to make a critical as well as constructive contribution, they are most welcome to do some work in this society.

Thomas Reuter

Deane Fergie deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au

Thu Sep 25 19:42:10 EST 2003

Colleagues, Here with all due respect, I and hoping you can read this as if it were spoekn (I was breathless a little at the time I wrote I suspect) is why I think we need to work on a history of the multiple associations of Australian anthropologists. D

----- Forwarded message from Deane Fergie <deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au> -----
Date: Thu, 25 Sep 2003

17:21:59 +0930 From: Deane Fergie <deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au> Reply-To: Deane Fergie <deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au> Subject: Anthropology and the Professionalisation of Learning To: Mark Hannah <Mark.Hannah@anu.edu.au>

Dear Mark, Clearly I need to do a little more than ask for people to make contributions about the history of tensions and associations amongst AUstralia's anthropologists - for it relates directly to the question you are quite reasonably insisting we address.

Here is my understanding of the situation: Your question relates to an enduring debate amongst us Anthropologists, and particularly those of us who have been around and about since the early to mid- eightes (but I have suggested with a legacy from a much earlier epoch). The debate was, at one level, whether AAS should be a 'learned society', open to all with an interest in the subject or a 'professional association' open only to those who qualify as professional practitioners (such as honours degrees - the answer then is 'Yes' Francis).

The chronology I think runs a bit like this:

- 1) from Radcliffe_Brown's soujourn at Sydney (???) up until around 1973 the small and of Australian anthropologists in AUstralia got together as an outlier of the Association of Social Anthropologists (ASA) a British association of Social Anthropologists (and I assume had conferences - but I just don't know)
- 2) 1973 to c1989/90 Australian Anthropological Soceity incorporated and run as a learned society. (This is when I think the coup by young bloods of the old boys of the anciene regime dates from I think - it also corresponds to the dramatic expansion of university depts of anthrop in Australia - so I think you could say there were sufficient numbers for a coup)
- 3) 1989/90 AAS constitution amended to turn it into a professional association with the membership criteria you have quoted.

The change-over - from learned society to professional body was an agonising one - and can be traced in part to the use of anthropology in statutory proceedings (e.g. Land Rights Act, NT). Here is a line in too to the applied/academic split now been talked about. First of all we got ourselves a Code of Ethics - in my memory largely drafted by applied anthropologists - Peter Sutton, Diane Bell (am I right?) and amidst a broad perception that people seeking to give evidence in court would have their expert authority boosted by the authority of a code of ethics. However it was not all in the

applied camp - there was also a big scandal. The other important background to that was also the relationship of some anthropological research, the CIA and the war in Vietnam/Cambodia (a case which caused a huge rift in the Sydney Dept at the time with rifts that have reached a couple of decades and into contemporary times I understand, but impacted more widely and brought anthropology into some public question at the same time. There was a big question then on the agenda - who should anthropologists work for / how should their research be used (and as I understand it there was some question about anthropological research being used to time B52 bombing campaigns...)

Also important for understanding these shifts in my view is the impact of the Warramungu Case (a land claim under the Land Rights Act NT) around 1985 as I recall. This was the first big test of our waters (in my time at least) in a very adversarial case in which anthropological evidence in proceedings was really, really tested - and indeed the judge ordered a number of anthropologists to produce their field notes to the courts. This caused a testing of whether anthropologists could claim some sort of privilege for our recordings - like lawyers for example who have a first line of defence against the production of notes they write with/for a client. The case caused enormous consternation at the time because many of us, until then had assumed we could tell our informants we'd keep their confidences if they asked us to, and that we could. It turns out, we can't! The other thing that I remember from this time was AAS AGM's in which applied anthropologists in this predicament called for their colleagues more generally to back them - and the assistance was largely (?almost completely?) not forthcoming.

So what we have in the lead up to the professionalising of the Society around 1990 are issues at the heart of applied practice, and particularly the practice of applied anthropology WITHIN Australia, but not ones that many 'pure' anthropologists thought of all that much moment (I say clear because the proof is in the pudding we are presently supping upon).

However even after the change in the constitution around 1990 (that's when the tiered membership scheme also took effect - Fellows (FFAS's - just think how it sounds) and MAAS's and then those who'd like to be but can't be without more qualifying the debate was far from over. In my view the creation of the Clearing House is testimony to the enduring failure of the tension between 'learned' (but not necessarily qualified) and 'Professional' (but clearly in some minds not necessarily learned enough) sides. Then of course there are, with all due respect to my learned and good friend Andrew, the conscientious objectors (aka 'resisters').

I think the other historical current we also need to think about in considering what we have become, and what we can become, is the attack on elites (and particularly intellectuals and expert authorities) which has been played out on the national political agenda over the past decade or two (hence, I think the reference to Ron Brunton, who is often understood to have been a contributor to this process). In this our discipline has been cast as a kind of 'soft', 'politically correct', and biased muddle-headed wombat (well 'advocates' then... and this is the background of my learned friend, Peter Sutton's, comments. This political current has put us all under pressure, but it has put applied anthropologists under particular pressure I think.

And so we have a strange genealogy of association - learned (with and without qualification) versus professional (with qualifications of learning from within the academy)

felt to be hijacking the agenda of the discipline.... and we all want some mates to rub ideas up against...

I wonder then if there's a compromise we should contemplate. It does occur to me that we might profitably contemplate a further constitutional change - one which welcomes 'learned associates' as you are calling for MARK, but also allows people to be FAAS's and MAAS's (like Francis Claffey, anthropologist of worthy application).

HOWever I must say that what has become clear to me over the last day or so of eReading is that I am not alone in feeling thoroughly marginalised and alienated from my colleagues in Australia (well globally actually). I thought my sense of marginalisation/alienation/grief stemmed from being in the vortex Australian Anthropology's second great test of the waters (the Hindmarsh horrors), but I see that the grief and sense of alienation is much more general and much more generally based.

And while we are contemplating such reforms to our manners of association - I have a further recommendation. I do think we have terrible trouble doing 'colleagial' and 'critical' amongst ourselves at the same time. I suggest that Karl (Marx) and that Ollman bloke might offer some analytic framework for understanding this - I think our trouble is that we are not sufficiently alienated from the products of our labours to not feel deeply (if not mortally) offended when someone critiques them/us - here in our academic (if not applied) practice ego and idea tend towards fusion and any other ego/idea criticising them is ipso facto criticising 'me'. What to do? (as Lindy might say).

Well one upshot of my Hindmarsh horrors is that I have done a lot of observing of the legal profession - and I now think there is a lot to be said for the propriety of good collegial manners - and so my learned friends I look forward to the moot continuing with your rebuttal!

Deane

David F Martin David.Martin.at.anthropos.com.au

Thu Sep 25 20:35:16 EST 2003

I've thoroughly enjoyed the ongoing debate on AASNet regarding the AAS.

There's been a bit of self-indulgence (mea culpa?) but also some really important ideas and perspectives. I think it would be a pity if this were to disappear into some sort of digital ether (in fact, it is archived and retrievable), and would like to propose that it form the basis for consideration by the AAS of its future directions over the next year - perhaps through a small group (like that who have been working on the ethics code) preparing a discussion paper for publication on the AAS web site and eventual consideration by the Society's membership. What do members / Members think? A matter for the AGM in Sydney?

David Martin

John.Avery at nt.gov.au John.Avery.at.nt.gov.au

Fri Sep 26 09:01:11 EST 2003

John Morton wrote:

I find the dismissive and Manichean Avery tone (good old science opposing everything else) a wee bit worrying.

I would too, but I deny having a dismissive Manichaeian tone, and I would not lend my name to a particular brand of Manichaeian dismissiveness. Should I find the dismissive and Manichaeian Morton tone a wee bit paranoiac?

Let us avoid abuse.

My point was not 'good old science opposing everything else'. My view is that the discipline of anthropology should be conceived as scientific project aimed at understanding human social behaviour, sociology and culture as a natural phenomenon. To do that the discipline has to get over cultural relativism to the extent that this undermines confidence in the scientific project and it has to enter friendly trade with its neighbouring studies. This does not devalue phenomenological field data and the like, anymore than science would be devalued by itself being a phenomenon of the natural world. It is not about science opposing everything else, it is about anthropology joining the rich domain to which, in my opinion, certain tendencies in anthropology have encouraged resistance.

I might say that there would be many anthropologists - physical anthropologists, biological anthropologists, many archaeologists, for example - who would take this for granted.

John Avery **Jeremy Beckett** jbeckett@mail.bigpond.com
Fri Sep 26 12:08:40 EST 2003

Re Deane's History of Anthropology, her beginning is not quite straight.

There was no association of anthros until the mid-1950s. Sydney was the only social anthropology department; Adelaide did mainly biological anthropology and they fought bitterly over funds.

The initiative for the Australian chapter of the British ASA came mainly from ANU, particularly Nadel and Freeman who were already members.

Members had to have Ph D or equivalent AND be admitted first by the British ASA, though grad students could attend the conference. I was told the main reason for setting up ASA was to keep out the many amateurs and colonial officers in the RAI, particularly Lord Raglan (don't ask me why him).

The breakaway from the British stemmed as Deane suggests from the number of new departments, and perhaps an attempt to break free from British social anthro (or was that just me?). But basically there were enough of us by then to want to run our own show. Remarkably, membership requirements were quite liberal. I remember Ian Bedford, just appointed to Macquarie Anthro but with a ph D in Political Science, waiting outside until we decided on his eligibility. We decided in his favour.

At that time there were only members and non-members, but I can't remember whether we required PhD or equivalent.

It's possible some of the veterans of the ASA period regretted the change, but I don't remember a fight. Sorry to make the history so undramatic.

Jeremy Beckett

Deane Fergie deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au

Fri Sep 26 13:45:28 EST 2003

Thankyou Jeremy for straightening me out on the period between R-B and 1973.

I am wondering if you, or anyone else, can also remember whether the Oz chapter of ASA held conferences (and if so where) and what was the position of Berndt when he went off to found UWA (when was that?)? Has anyone got an ready- reckoner of when each Dept of Social Anthropology was established (and then disestablished in many cases) around the country?

And as a postscript to the move from ASA to AAS I almost feel bound to remark for those who do not know the characters - that the short but very feisty and iconoclastic Dawn RYan (who had working class roots from Casino on country NSW - and who, moreover, had taken herself off to do her PhD at Hawaii (of all places) after an Honours at SYdney and a period with ANU in Papua) was as I said, my informant after a Coopers or two. My knowledge of her was that she was always likely to see (and recount with a flourish) the drama of events like the inception/conception of AAS and the wasting away (if that is what happened) of an Australian branch of ASA. This refelcts ofcourse the fact that drama is in the eye of the beholder and the voice of the re-teller. No wonder history is so hard, and they are at war with each other! Deane

Deane

Damon Parker damon.parker@adelaide.edu.au

Fri Sep 26 12:27:09 EST 2003

Hello

I want to chip in to the current discussion concerning science and/or anthropology, because it is something I have thought about for some time now.

First, this is, of course, a debate with a long tradition. It stikes me that each time anthropologists call for anthropology to become a scientific project there is the assumption that science is something that can simply be adopted.

I don't actually know any anthropologists (some colleagues in bioanthropology and archaeology excepted) who are scientists. I know a few anthropologists who have transferred from scientific disciplines (e.g., chemistry, biology) into anthropology.

To be scientific is to be trained as a scientist - one cannot simply decide to be scientific. I imagine people who want anthropology to be a scientific project are not thinking of a

'hard' (as opposed to 'soft') science project, i.e. trying to make anthropology over in the image of mathematics, physics and chemistry. They are perhaps thinking more along the lines of the 'soft' sciences such as biology and, in some ways, medical science. Either way, to go down that path is to make anthropology physics, chemistry, biology.

Those disciplines already exist - why replicate them? The physicalist account of human life also exists: it's called biological anthropology. Once again, one must be trained in biological anthropology. The difference between 'hard' and 'soft' science, as I see it, is that the former introduces variables to experiments, while the latter tries to eliminate variables.

If, however, the idea is that anthropology should be made up as a branch of science (however 'soft') in and of itself, a science dealing with social and cultural phenomena, that has already been done. Take a look at some recent publications in disciplines such as nursing, psychiatry, psychology and social work, and you will see a large collection of work that, in its own way, attempts to render social phenomena as a scientific object. This work is peppered with references to the following methodological keywords: Replication Randomization Double-blind Standardization Statistical analysis Now, this approach also cannot simply be adopted: one must be trained in these techniques, and there are entire departments dedicated to teaching these techniques. I don't recall any of these terms being mentioned as an undergraduate or as a postgraduate. I am currently working in an academic psychiatry department (I am however a cultural anthropologist), and many of the people here tell me they work with a 'bio-psycho-social' model of human life. While I don't buy the idea that a hyphen solves tenacious philosophical problems, I do believe that these people are further down the track of sounding like scientists than any anthropologists are.

The next point concerning this perennial debate is that 'science' is always counterpoised with 'relativism'. Relativism as a metaphysical position is absurd in the best sense of the term. In its hard-edged version, for instance, it asserts a universal: i.e. everything is relative. Yet its logical fallibility should not automatically make us think it is useless, or that it cannot be found out in the world away from the logician's desk.

More importantly, do we really propose that there are only two modes of understanding in the world?

As to the question of anthropology's relevance in the modern world, and the pressure the academic discipline is under here in Australia, wanting to make anthropology 'science' resolves none of these issues. In courts and tribunals, anthropologists face law, not science.

In universities, anthropologists face bureaucracy and politics, not science. Scientists are not safe from any of these things.

In other words, the stumbling blocks anthropologists routinely confront are networks of relations that assert and govern sanctioned ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. I would have thought we were the experts on these things, even we who are relativist phenomenologists. And on the point of phenomenology, neither Husserl nor Heidegger considered themselves relativists, and they also did no lab work.

Incidentally, the basis for science - mathematics - began as mystical formulae that circulated in secret societies in ancient Greece.

Regards Damon

Margaret Trawick [trawick at clear.net.nz](mailto:trawick@clear.net.nz)
Fri Sep 26 17:11:59 EST 2003

Here I must say some more things.

There is no contradiction at all between anthropological relativism and good science. I would stand by the claim that cultural relativism is one of the great contributions of anthropology to the scientific endeavor.

Unfortunately, the idea of cultural relativism has been distorted and misused by some not-very-deep-thinking people, and has been mocked and dismissed by some other people of the same ilk. The greatest proponent of cultural relativism, and also the truest proponent of anthropology as a science, was Franz Boas, who demonstrated to the world that all natural human languages are of equal complexity and coherence, to the extent that such things can be measured. No truly scientific anthropologist, and indeed no truly well educated person of the present day, would claim that one language is better or truer than all other languages. And where language goes, the rest of culture is not far behind.

This does not mean that all statements are equally true. That is the naive, absurdist definition of relativism, and it is a false definition. It also does not mean that all cultures are equally good, by some moral definition of good. It simply means that no single absolutist definition of truth is true. Science is a matter of determining what is false, and proposing provisional truths (hypotheses) some of which, like Newtonian physics, may prove quite useful and illuminating, even after their truth value has been shown to be limited and provisional. Every cultural development is an adaptation to some situation, which includes pre-existing cultural developments. Not every cultural development is an optimally good adaptation to a given situation. Possibly no adaptation is optimal in some ideal sense. And certainly no adaptation can be of eternal, universal value. That is why some of us promote cultural diversity as an essential feature of the human species - essential not in the sense that it cannot be eliminated, but essential in the sense that it is required for the survival of the species.

There is nothing at all wrong with accepting provisional truths for what they are, building on them, and testing them. There is something wrong with rejecting all information that apparently contradicts those provisional truths. When one adopts an absolutist stance, one is headed for trouble.

More than one inhumane and destructive political system has been built upon an absolutist ideology.

Maybe anthropology is more tolerant of diversity within its ranks than some other disciplines. And certainly some bad anthropology has been done in the spirit of naive relativism. But bad physics has also been done, let us not forget, to say nothing of bad psychology and bad medical science. This does not mean that such disciplines,

including anthropology, cannot have a true scientific heart. It may (or may not) be true that you cannot be a scientist without training. But it is also true that all the training in the world cannot guarantee the production of a scientist. It can guarantee, at best, the production of a competent technician. This is my view, but not only mine.

Will stop here for now.

Margaret

Patrick McConvell [Patrick.McConvell at aiatsis.gov.au](mailto:Patrick.McConvell@aiatsis.gov.au)

Fri Sep 26 13:50:52 EST 2003

It is so refreshing to hear someone defending and advocating science in socio-cultural anthropology. This has been all-but heretical in the earlier days of the dominance of cultural relativism and much more so in these days of the dominance of anti-science post-modernism.

I do agree though that some terminology - like calling cultural relativism 'infantile' is less than helpful, and not particularly scientific, although I appreciate what John Avery is saying.

To the list of branches of anthropology for whom science is not a problem I could add linguistics. I have been impressed with the way linguistic anthropology has been able to tackle issues claimed by the po-mo's as their own, such as a reflexive stance towards ethnography, without at the same time abandoning science. Now that anthropology is in an intellectual crisis, I think the view Avery is putting will gain ground, but the opposition will be strong.

In the USA of course this science vs anti-science division has led to the splitting of anthropology departments. Unfortunately this means in practice that biological anthropology and archaeology line up against socio-cultural anthropology, reinforcing prejudices and isolating sub-disciplines. What is needed now is more joint work between science-oriented disciplines and socio-cultural anthropology, not the raising of barricades. This should be a two way learning process - science-oriented disciplines also have much to learn from socio-cultural anthropology, as well as the other way round.

Pat McConvell

Ian Keen [Ian.Keen at anu.edu.au](mailto:Ian.Keen@anu.edu.au)

Fri Sep 26 14:42:11 EST 2003

Much of the disaffection among some of our colleagues with the AAS springs, it seems to me, from the fact that it combines a professional organisation, catering for people who work in applied anthropology, with a scholarly society. I think it was a mistake to turn the AAS into a professional organisation in the 1980s - a number of us who were at the University of Queensland at the time were pressing for a separate body.

A scholarly society would attract a broader spectrum of members especially if the rigid rules of membership were eased, and promote broader debate both informally and at the annual conference. A separate professional body would be able to cater for the particularly needs of its members, including criteria for professional status, specific codes of ethics etc. I don't mean to imply that a scholarly society should cut itself off from engagement with political and ethical issues involving the discipline, of course. But these two kinds of organisation do meet rather different needs. There would be nothing to prevent individuals from being members of both.

Ian Keen – Ian Keen School of Archaeology and Anthropology The Faculties Australian National University Canberra 0200 Australia

John.Avery at nt.gov.au John.Avery at nt.gov.au
Fri Sep 26 14:55:49 EST 2003

Patrick McConville wrote:

I do agree though that some terminology - like calling cultural relativism 'infantile' is less than helpful, and not particularly scientific, although I appreciate what John Avery is saying.

I apologise for 'infantile'. I did not mean it to be purely derogatory, though of course it is derogatory. There is a philosopher's view (particularly emanating from Hegel and Nietzsche) that forms of scepticism, with which I associated aspects of cultural relativism, are regressive or reactive and therefore infantile. I see it in my pre-teenage kids: "But how do we know we are not just dreaming ...?" I mean we have to get over and beyond cultural relativism in this sense.

I agree with Patrick's views about linguistics.

John Avery

Margaret Trawick trawick at clear.net.nz
Fri Sep 26 20:30:02 EST 2003

The following ponderous missive of mine seems not to have gone through the first time, so am trying again. If it does not go through this time either, will take the hint of the system and give up.

There is no contradiction at all between anthropological relativism and good science. Cultural relativism is one of the great contributions of anthropology to the scientific endeavor.

Unfortunately, the idea of cultural relativism has been distorted and misused by some not-very-deep-thinking people, and has been mocked and dismissed by some other people of the same ilk. The greatest proponent of cultural relativism, and also the truest proponent of anthropology as a science, was Franz Boas, who demonstrated to the world that all natural human languages are of equal complexity and coherence, to the extent that such things can be measured. No truly scientific anthropologist, and indeed no truly well educated person of the present day, would claim that one language is better

or truer than all other languages. And where language goes, the rest of culture is not far behind.

This does not mean that all statements are equally true. That is the naive, absurdist definition of relativism, and it is a false definition. It also does not mean that all cultures are equally good, by some moral definition of good. It simply means that no single absolutist definition of truth is true. Science is a matter of determining what is false, and proposing provisional truths (hypotheses) some of which, like Newtonian physics, may prove quite useful and illuminating, even after their truth value has been shown to be limited and provisional. Every cultural development is an adaptation to some situation, which includes pre-existing cultural developments. Not every cultural development is an optimally good adaptation to a given situation. Possibly no adaptation is optimal in some ideal sense. And certainly no adaptation can be of eternal, universal value. That is why some of us promote cultural diversity as an essential feature of the human species - essential not in the sense that it cannot be eliminated, but essential in the sense that it is required for the survival of the species.

There is nothing at all wrong with accepting provisional truths for what they are, building on them, and testing them. There is something wrong with rejecting all information that apparently contradicts those provisional truths. When one adopts an absolutist stance, one is headed for trouble.

More than one inhumane and destructive political system has been built upon an absolutist ideology.

Maybe anthropology is more tolerant of diversity within its ranks than some other disciplines. And certainly some bad anthropology has been done in the spirit of naive relativism. But bad physics has also been done, let us not forget, to say nothing of bad psychology and bad medical science. This does not mean that such disciplines, including anthropology, cannot have a true scientific heart. It may (or may not) be true that you cannot be a scientist without training. But it is also true that all the training in the world cannot guarantee the production of a scientist. It can guarantee, at best, the production of a competent technician. This is my view, but not only mine.

Will stop here for now.

Margaret

Fiona Magowan fiona.magowan@adelaide.edu.au

Fri Sep 26 21:44:21 EST 2003

Further to Ian's suggestion that the 'rigid rules of membership be eased' it might be of interest to know that at the ASA decennial conference in Manchester in July this year fewer than 70 of the 450+ participants were ASA members. This situation seems to be an issue for EASA also. Both ASA and EASA have previously required that conference participants be members. David Mills' article 'Professionalizing or popularizing anthropology?' outlines the history of professionalization in the British Isles in the most recent issue of *Anthropology Today* Vol 19 no. 5 October 2003. It is also interesting for its history of the founding of ASA and its early connections with the antipodes as Jeremy has summarised. Mills does suggest that 'the most succesful (sic) learned societies are

those able to adapt to changing times, to a restructuring university sector, and to a climate of suspicion of 'gatekeeping' professional knowledge'. It offers an interesting comparative perspective for this debate.

Best wishes, Fiona

erezjane at iprimus.com.au [erezjane at iprimus.com.au](mailto:erezjane@iprimus.com.au)
Sat Sep 27 17:22:01 EST 2003

Dear All

I haven't yet read all the e-mail of the last week but I think that our main problem as anthropologists in Australia is part of what is happening to all Australian universities and academic disciplines. Read the following link from today's Age:

Academia on the defensive By Roslyn Guy September 27, 2003

URL: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/09/26/1064083191621.html> Erez

Barry Morris [Barry.Morris at newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Barry.Morris@newcastle.edu.au)
Tue Sep 30 08:13:00 EST 2003

I declare myself as a non-member. I also write in support of Lattas's point that there is a need for new agendas. I must confess to being surprised at the negative responses to Andrew as I felt that Annette Hamilton's keynote address said more damaging things about the moribund nature of anthropology, intellectually and organisationally than anything that has been said here (pp.6-8 in particular). It described an anthropology I didn't recognise. Nevertheless, the keynote address is referred too often enough and approvingly to make me wonder why all the fuss when Andrew makes seemingly similar claims. What I find amazing in Annette's piece is that we did it all to ourselves by failing to be entrepreneurial enough. While I accept Annette's assessment of the marginalisation of the discipline in the current political circumstances, I do not accept her argument or representation of academic changes. Her global discussion operates at such a general and homogenising level that it can say everything and nothing. As if all that is claimed for history cannot be said of anthropology in its response to contemporary intellectual debates. There are also those who have embraced them and those who have rejected them. I would suggest that there is also a sleight of hand in suggesting that the processes of change can be understood simply on shifting intellectual grounds rather than the reshaping of modern state forms and economic rationalism. Indeed, intellectual content usually take second place to how many 'bums on seats'. Outcomes rather than inputs are all that are measured.

What Annette does succeed in drawing attention to is the lack of discussion about these issues. There are major structural and organisational changes taking place will impact upon the discipline and research. The potential intellectual vitality of multi-disciplinary exchanges is often far more banal in its operation. The preferred growth of the 'multi-disciplinary School' is often set up in opposition to disciplinary based teaching. In the creation and reshaping of Schools, one or two members are appointed from each discipline making it impossible to develop a discipline based program or the discipline is positioned as a marginal option to major vocational courses, e.g., education. Moving to

multi-disciplinary rather than disciplinary based models can mean that the institutional support for discipline based knowledge no longer exists. In the restructuring of universities, new executive bodies and heads (with limited knowledge of the arts, let alone particular disciplines), rather than departments, set the rules and shape teaching agendas, and our capacity to continue to control teaching agendas, honours and post-graduate programs relevant to anthropology. We operate in an arena of continual cost cutting, heavily reliant on student fees rather than public investment to keep the system afloat. Apparently we are up there with the economic superpowers, Japan and the US, with our levels of private funding for universities (our money comes primarily from student fee).

If the AAS is going to address the marginalisation of anthropology, it is going to require more than referrals to a keynote address. It will require a more co-ordinated response and discussion and one that the AAS is best situated to facilitate in the interests of anthropology in its various contemporary forms. regards, Barry Morris

David F Martin [David.Martin at anthropos.com.au](mailto:David.Martin@anthropos.com.au)

Tue Sep 30 10:24:13 EST 2003

Barry Morris's contribution to this debate is useful and thoughtful.

However, he ends by suggesting that the AAS is best situated to facilitate a more co-ordinated response and discussion of the issues he sees as confronting the discipline in these troubled times. My question then is how this can be done when the AAS does not have the commitment and broadly-based membership which this would require? I personally am opposed to any notion of the AAS becoming a regulating body for the profession, even for those outside the academy, which would in part require almost compulsory membership. But I cannot see the consistency in bemoaning the state of the discipline, or even that of the Society, while absenting oneself from the active affairs of the AAS.

David Martin

Jeremy Beckett [jbeckett at mail.bigpond.com](mailto:jbeckett@mail.bigpond.com)

Tue Sep 30 08:41:56 EST 2003

Barry Morris's message sets out clearly what Andrew Lattas might have said but only hinted at. What he says has to be taken seriously and debated.

What I don't understand is why he and those who share his view don't make sure that these issues get discussed in meetings by being members. I don't, however, believe that Annette Hamilton's keynote address of last year was the last word on the subject, or the position of some AAS 'establishment'. It does however represent the thinking of quite a few universities and it's no use just waiting for it to go away.

Jeremy Beckett

Gillian Cowlishaw [gillian.cowlishaw at uts.edu.au](mailto:gillian.cowlishaw@uts.edu.au)

Wed Oct 1 08:25:09 EST 2003

I thought Andrew, Margaret, Lesley etc. and now Barry were explaining why dozens of anthropologists are not members of AAS. Asking them to join is of course reasonable, but more reflexive responses might also be in order.

Did any anthropologists notice that Edward Said died? Gillian

John Morton [J.Morton at latrobe.edu.au](mailto:J.Morton@latrobe.edu.au)

Wed Oct 1 10:49:38 EST 2003

Well, there's a lot to say - and a lot that's already been said, 'reflexive' or not. But the major issue is that of participation vs non-participation. It's hardly surprising, then, that people come back to the matter of joining again and again.

Eddie who? Was he a member? Somebody just whispered 'Palestine' in my ear, which made me think that there may be certain cells among us who are rather like the People's Front of Judea. Do we have any Brians who want to join up? Just make sure you get the nomenclature right.

Gary Robinson [garyw.robinson at bigpond.com](mailto:garyw.robinson@bigpond.com)

Wed Oct 1 23:07:58 EST 2003

Dear All, This is a quick input. I dont think this can be resolved at the level of motives or personalities, the refusniks versus the members, etc. That is far too narrow a take on what appears to me to be a serious issue.

I think there may be reason to rethink structures underpinning AAS. There are clearly a good many people outside AAS with anthropological interests and training who have gone into disciplines other than anthro, and/or who do a good many things not well represented by AAS core business. AAS organization and conference do seem very dependent on the support of academic disciplines for their reproduction, along with a fairly small group of specialists in native title and related areas of consultancy or employment. Even though there's a fair bit of diversity in terms of what the various disciplines do around the nation (contrast Perth with Canberra and now Sydney - which I will unfortunately miss) the structure does favour an inward spiral towards narrowness which at best shifts focus a bit with the relocation of conference and functions each year. It is also a structure which will struggle to nurture a new generation, since it will recruit from a relatively small cohort of students who follow orthodox study sequences to their conclusion.

The key to it is the marketability of the breadth and diversity of anthropological, ethnographic and related knowledges and their products.

This means that there is a need to redesign the objectives of AAS around capturing and representing that diversity and breadth as its core charter as THE umbrella organization, rather than focusing on a relatively narrow almost-professionalized version. If we could somehow create the bigger inclusive vision, then it would be a relatively easy matter to support specialists in Native Title or medical Anthropology into dedicated groupings with their variously professionalized approaches and qualifications for entry. We impose pure "Anthropological" qualifications on the broad membership of AAS at its peril.

What I would suggest is that AAS needs a way to introduce an overarching level of structure which can represent more diverse interests - that means, get people into an executive or managerial or reference group structure to specifically represent the broadest range of potentials across as many universities and other bodies - including publishers and maybe consumers as well as some of the new research institutions such as CRCs - as possible.

Accommodate the rest of the "professional" specializations within this breadth.

On the conferences etc., there is a certain inevitable efficiency to handing the AAS baton from department to department: everyone clearly has enough to do and it's easiest to do it in one place. But the process is to my mind also a significant part of the problem. It locks anthropology down to a narrow and unexciting base.

An aside: in a past life as an assistant dean, I had the task of securing the accreditation of a Psychology program and had to virtually run the whole process. I understand it well, I think. Some of the very senior APS Psychology Professors I met said to me quite openly that the whole accreditation strategy of the APS had led to an excessive narrowing and standardization of ideas in Psychology and had killed off a lot of valuable diversity. Of course, only mature psychologists and Oxford Dons who have seen a bit of the world dare utter thoughts like that these days.

Accreditation works for psychology for quite distinct reasons. I am convinced that the professional accreditation model is no basis for the marketability of Anthropology. I am convinced that a structure which can promote academic, intellectual and applied diversity is the way to go, albeit with a range of specializations which may mimic the accreditation approach to a limited degree, with an eye on specific markets such as Native Title.

What I am suggesting here may well mean finding a new funding strategy, one which is not solely reliant on membership dues, as at present. That is clearly an absolute constraint on the AAS, in its current form.

Professionalism on the part of AAS and Anthropologists means attacking the marketplace, not defining oneself out of it.

Gary Robinson

Dr Gary Robinson, Director, CNAAR, Centre for North Australian and Asian Research

Jeremy Beckett jbeckett@mail.bigpond.com

Tue Oct 28 10:25:53 EST 2003

The scrub fire that David Martin started in the run-up to the conference, about the function and future of AAS, seems to have burned down. That's unfortunate since some issues were raised that need working through.

Can we stoke it up a little before the summer torpor sets in ? And are there matters that the Executive should be considering, perhaps to refer to a sub-committee or to frame recommendations for the next AGM.

Jeremy

Allon Uhlmann [ajuhlmann at allonuhlmann.com](mailto:ajuhlmann@allonuhlmann.com)

Mon Oct 27 21:29:27 EST 2003

Greetings from southern California, where the image of stoking up the fire is probably not the most opportune at the moment, but still...

One issue that we might want to take up is the suggestion that was raised by Ian Keen and others about the need to have two separate organisations: one a learned society, and one as a professional body to cater to the needs of applied practitioners. I am not sure what arguments, if any, were brought up against it (I might have missed some of the emails in the flurry at the time). On the face of it, the idea strikes me as a good one. A learned society that is disconnected from the professional body can expand its membership base (by allowing amateurs in, and by involving fellow travellers in other parts of Australasia--after all, there is no need to reify the artificial borders of the nation state, is there?), by conducting activities which might be perceived by practitioners as inappropriate or compromising (eg like taking stands on social, cultural and political issues--a learned society whose members do not rely on government and NGO contracts will not risk much in alienating the establishment), and by dedicating more organisational energies into other aspects of promoting anthropology as an intellectual pursuit (eg developing programs in anthro for high school, and having training sessions for high school teachers). I think that the kind of openness that will benefit such an organisation may not suite the more regimented structure that would support an organisation of Practitioner Anthropologists.

I think a separation will also allow the organisation of practitioner anthropologists to focus on promoting the applied profession. Judging by the state of affairs in the USA, there are great market niches that can be better exploited by practitioners, such as medical anthro, market research, cross-cultural mediation, diversity training and so on and so forth. Also, an organisation of practitioners can enforce a much more rigorous membership regime on its members, and legitimately charge hefty fees to allow for services (eg insurance) that are rather irrelevant to the exclusively learned types.

What do other participants think?

Cheers, A.

David F Martin [David.Martin at anu.edu.au](mailto:David.Martin@anu.edu.au)

Tue Oct 28 21:14:56 EST 2003

Colleagues, with reference to Jeremy's comments about the 'scrub fire' AASNet debate which I started, moves have started to make sure that we don't scrub it from our corporate memory. At the AAS AGM, for example, Thomas Reuter noted in his report on the year's activities that the executive would be following this up. I've also proposed that I make the entire debate available on the AAS website, but that will have to await my return from Cape York where I am presently ensconced. One idea is that the debate be used as one of the resources for a consideration of future directions of the society,

perhaps through a subcommittee like that which worked on the code of ethics, and that a suitably qualified person be engaged for a short period to provide expert input and assistance. Any views? With regard to Allon's and Lesley's comments on whether there should be a separate 'learned society', with applied practitioners in their own, I must say my personal opinion lies very much with Lesley. There are a number of false assumptions in Allon's contribution, eg the inference that 'applied' folk are adverse to comments being issued in the society's name on political or social issues because of conflicts of interest. It would be a quite unnecessary division between different, but intimately related, branches of the same practice (remember Bourdieu??). It would also be quite impractical-the society as a whole is far too small as it is to think of dividing it even further.

David Martin

Lesley Jolly l.jolly@staff.uqi.uq.edu.au

Tue Oct 28 18:02:08 EST 2003

I would hope we're all learned but not many of us can afford to be "exclusively learned types". Academics who occasionally take on contract/tender work also need services like insurance and need to be part of wider debates about the conduct of anthropology in non-traditional settings. I would prefer to see a range of membership options in a single society (to cater for the issue of excluding those whose practice is problematic) rather than the separation of activities that ought to be mutually informing.

Lesley Jolly

Dr Lesley Jolly Behavioural Studies, School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences University of Queensland

Deane Fergie deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au

Wed Oct 29 12:06:15 EST 2003

I am with Lesley and David.

There simply aren't enough anthropologists in AUstralia (or even who pass through Australia or send letters to Australia or know how to spell both Australia and anthropology) even if supplemented by friends of the discipline/profession (who can spell both and post letters) to support two separate associations of anthropologists/ two executives/ two conference committees/ two annual conferences/ two editorial committees/ two newsletters/ etc etc. And anyway as keeps being pointed out - an increasing number of us increasingly do bits and pieces of it all anyway.

Lets get real - a really real problem for AAS is getting people to find and then devote the time and resources to keep going what we've got happening now.

My view then is that we've got to make the best of what we've got. Indeed I think it likely is that diversity is actually our most fundamental ignition point as an organisation. But we need to find better ways to embrace the diversity of our interests as anthropologists and the diversity of opinions about the nature of our discipline and positions in its associations.

One response to this at the membership level might be to have three basic membership categories and redefine them. Here's my first go at rethinking membership and association:

Full Members - people who are interested in anthropological knowledge and committed to its furtherance (and any other parts of the the definition of membership outlined in the old constitution of AAS as learned society).

Fellows - members whose application for the recognition of their academic qualifications in anthropology (ordinarily say Hons degree or equiv and above) has been accepted by the membership (formerly accreditation) subcommittee of the

Society.

Professional Fellows - Fellows whose application for professional recognition (say on the additional basis of their experience or applied qualifications or the like has been accepted by professional practice committee of the Society).

We could call the professional practice sub committee something like the 'Clearing House' or the 'professional practice committee' or the 'practically professional committee' or what ever - but I don't think such a reconfiguring of the membership categories necessarily means adding another organisational level to what we have already (which would overburden us again)

Deane

PS I'm also just thinking that maybe instead of 'Fellows' and 'Professional Fellows' we offer Shiela-ships and Special Shiela-ships for people who find those terms too elitist and metropolitan...

Grant McCall [G.McCall at unsw.edu.au](mailto:G.McCall@unsw.edu.au)

Wed Oct 29 13:36:28 EST 2003

PS I'm also just thinking that maybe instead of 'Fellows' and 'Professional Fellows' we offer Shiela-ships and Special Shiela-ships for people who find those terms too elitist and metropolitan...

I with Deane, but only if we can have australianised "blokeships" as well!

Grant

Allon Uhlmann [ajuhlmann at allonuhlmann.com](mailto:ajuhlmann@allonuhlmann.com)

Tue Oct 28 21:03:11 EST 2003

Hi again,

I think David's idea of a committee or subcommittee would be a good forum to debate these issues.

I take the points that were raised by Leslie, Deane and David. However, I don't think that the original suggestion to split into two organisations was meant to split the memberships of both into two mutually exclusive groups. I thought the point was rather to split the organisational functions, not the world of anthropology. Wasn't it assumed in the original suggestion that many people would be members of both the professional and the learned bodies?

I think there is still an argument to be made for some sort of an organisational separation between the two functions, as they are quite different in intention and spirit. Perhaps one way of doing so without having two separate organisations would be to have the professional/applied body as an autonomous section within the AAS, with its own membership structure?

In any event, I think that precisely because the number of anthropologists is rather small, having a two-pronged approach might help us increase the social base of organised anthropology. This way, the professional/applied body could restrict membership to well qualified practitioners, and regulate the field of practised anthropology quite vigorously.

By contrast, a learned society could seek to be as inclusive as possible, seeking the active involvement of stake holders such as social science teachers, amateur anthropologists, interested scholars from other academic disciplines and so forth. I also think that the learned function would benefit from further increasing our membership and intellectual base by integrating our vocational kinfolk in NZ and PNG.

Anyhow, these issues are probably best debated in a committee or similar forum as per David's suggestion.

Cheers, A.

Allon Uhlmann [ajuhlmann at allonuhlmann.com](mailto:ajuhlmann@allonuhlmann.com)

Tue Oct 28 23:46:45 EST 2003

Hey John,

How about you have a joint membership with your canine? It can go under a new category of "every man and his dog", a new joint category that will emphasise anthropology's general openness. Also, now that we got rid of fellows and award sheila-ships, the "man" part of the dyad seems particularly relevant.

Mind you, I have some ethical concerns about that brute. Given his hostile attitudes towards ethnic minorities, Burmese and Siamese to be more precise, shouldn't he rather seek membership with the RSL? or maybe even join the government? If the drover's dog could have won that election, surely yours stands a realistic chance today?

A.

Lesley Jolly [l.jolly at staff.uqi.uq.edu.au](mailto:l.jolly@staff.uqi.uq.edu.au)

Wed Oct 29 11:48:43 EST 2003

I'd love to be a "Sheila of AAS"! And I agree with all of Deane's otehr points.

Lesley

Dr Neale Draper [neale at achm.com.au](mailto:neale@achm.com.au)

Wed Oct 29 13:07:30 EST 2003

But can blokes have sheila-ships too (sounds like shear-the-sheep), or would that be bodgy-ships (sounds too much like dodgy - blokeships?)?

Seriously, I agree entirely that AAS could usefully redefine membership categories and interests along the lines suggested by Deane, in order to accommodate the diversity that should be our greatest asset, but I would not like to see a split - the academic, consulting/professional, and fellow traveller interests are all core elements of Australian Anthropology, and as has been noted, individuals often overlap these categories.

Regards

Neale Draper

Deane Fergie [deane.fergie at adelaide.edu.au](mailto:deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au)

Wed Oct 29 13:44:00 EST 2003

Oh god - as usual I'm only half inspired - Lesley's got us the rest of the way - instead of FAAS's (Fellows of the Aust Anth Soc with very long private school vowels) we can shorten our 'a's and get to be recognised as SAASI (Sheilas of the Australian Anthropological Society Inc). or (with a bit of a lisp) SSAASI (Special SHiela's of AAS Inc). Maybe we could include our member ship numbers too after the letters after our names. I'd love to be able to call myself Dr Deane Fergie SSAASI-one - despite it all. And you might like to think of yourself as SSAASI-two.

And maybe we could think of a fourth basic category of membership for concientious objectors.... How about: - SSAASI-FRAS: -Subversive Shiela of the Australian Anthropological Society Inc - Formerly Resisters Against All Souped- up Sheilas.

Or maybe we could nominate and award a SSAASI-FRAS prize each year at the conference.

Deane

PS I've just read Grant's contribution (the Olympic falme at last is lit). Ofcourse Grant you can be be a Bugga of a BAAS if you want to

Grant McCall [G.McCall at unsw.edu.au](mailto:G.McCall@unsw.edu.au)

Wed Oct 29 14:49:03 EST 2003

Things obviously are getting overheated in SA (not to mention QLD)!

I think I'll have a nice cuppa and settle down now.....

Grant

Sophie Creighton sophie.creighton@jcu.edu.au

Wed Oct 29 12:19:12 EST 2003

I support the comments made by Lesley, Deane and David with regard to keeping the AAS together as an organization for both professionals and 'learned' types. The waste of time and resources point is well made. I agree that there is much cross-over and it is best for us all to keep abreast of the debates and issues on both fronts as they ultimately impact upon one another.

Regards, Sophie Creighton

John Morton J.Morton@latrobe.edu.au

Wed Oct 29 15:34:52 EST 2003

Well, my Australian Cattle Dog and I went for a walk the other day and he sniffed a Chihuahua's bum and a Pomeranian's nose, and he also chased a Burmese cat and a Siamese. Since my dog evidently possesses a fair quantum of ethnographic curiosity, can AAS please have a membership category for non-human beings?

Deane Fergie deane.fergie@adelaide.edu.au

Wed Oct 29 16:06:30 EST 2003

John, can this dog spell anthropology or AUstralia?

Paul Memmott p.memmott@mailbox.uq.edu.au

Wed Oct 29 17:36:19 EST 2003

Following on from other professions, the categories could be:

1. Life (no fees - oldies)
2. Fellow
3. Associate (normal membership)
4. Affiliate (from an outside discipline).
5. Student.

regards Paul Memmott

Lesley Jolly l.jolly@staff.uqi.uq.edu.au

Fri Oct 31 16:05:03 EST 2003

Further to these very apposite points I'd like to return to an issue mentioned tangentially by Allon. there are many places in which anthropological knowledge and skills are desired

(such as in business and industry) and since few trained anthropologists go there, a kind of watered down version of ethnographic practice and cultural analysis is the result.

That's another market we might also explore - by way of offering training and information as well as membership (which you have to admit is not a very practical benefit).

Lesley Dr Lesley Jolly

Brian Fegan [brian.fegan at bigpond.com](mailto:brian.fegan@bigpond.com)

Fri Oct 31 16:16:34 EST 2003

G'day, It's time AAS should get real about the problem of low membership and what it can realistically do about it.

The problem: The real problem about the small membership of AAS is, as Annette Hamilton's figures showed, that too few people who make a living from anthropology bother to join AAS. Adding a learned society membership category is fine. As a recruitment drive it is diversionary make-believe. It assumes that AAS can make the world at large know, by some undescribed means, that there has been a change in an obscure part of the constitution of an organisation they don't know about, and that some will leap at the long denied opportunity to join. If that's all that AAS does, then I'd hardly expect the Secretariat to be overwhelmed with new membership applications until pigs will fly. a.. No correspondent has yet addressed how to persuade to join AAS more of the freeriders in the existing membership categories. Those are open to the people who make a living from anthropology or who hope to do so. They should be the first targets for a recruitment drive. To persuade them to join we have first to know why they are not already members.

b.. No enthusiast for a new learned society category, open to people who don't make a living from anthropology, has addressed the practical problems of how to identify potential recruits to it, how to contact them so as send them a message of welcome, or what to offer them to persuade them to join. If AAS really wants to increase membership, then the practical have not next steps for a recruiting drive are pretty obvious: a.. AAS should circularise heads of anthropology departments and ask them to census which of their staff are members, which not, and ask them to provide contact details for all members or at least the generic email address for all members of that department.

b.. Armed with their contact details, AAS should circularise the free-riders, ask why they have not joined, ask of which other professional associations they are members, and what changes in AAS might persuade them to join. c.. AAS should contact the Institute, Land Councils and others who employ anthropologists as direct employees or consultants. It should request contact details for all those who call themselves anthropologists, or work in similar fields, find out who are the free-riders and what might persuade them to join.

Brian Fegan.

Brian Fegan [brian.fegan at bigpond.com](mailto:brian.fegan@bigpond.com)

Fri Oct 31 20:06:30 EST 2003

G'day, I sent a note earlier today without editing it. That version omitted ideas about how to encourage people who make their living from anthropology to join AAS. A classic response to the free rider problem is to close access to the commons, excluding outsiders. AAS undermines the value of membership by letting non-members use its services. To help present free-riders see the value of membership AAS should deliver services only to those who pay their dues. I recommend: a.. AAS should reconcile the list of members to the list of subscribers to AASnet. AAS should remove from AASnet all individuals who are not financial members (that lets organisations stay on the list).

b.. AAS should restrict to financial members the right to organise a panel at its conferences. Non-members can attend and give a paper by paying the non-member conference fee.

c.. AAS should restrict all other services to financial members.

Dr Brian Fegan Consultant Development Sociologist

Tim Curtis [tim at dingofrog.com](mailto:tim@dingofrog.com)
Fri Oct 31 12:42:31 EST 2003

The first point seems rather extreme, what if, as is my case, you are an Australian, an anthropologist, but working on the other side of the world. I would join AAS if I was working in Aus. but since that's not the case I'm not a member. On the other hand, AASnet is my way of keeping informed about what's going on back home. AASnet should be a forum for open discussion!!!

Tim Curtis

Gary Robinson [garyw.robinson at bigpond.com](mailto:garyw.robinson@bigpond.com)
Fri Oct 31 23:39:16 EST 2003

I think the free-rider contribution is either tongue in cheek (a la Swift), or a bit of academic zealotry.

Why not? Get tough! If the free-riders didn't join up but stopped free-riding, where then? Or does the accompanying risk assessment content itself with a % who jump in rather than away? The problem with toughness and zealotry is that it won't give AAS any product to flog - or rather, anything that anyone would want to buy.

The strange mix of defensiveness, status-consciousness and prudery behind some of this discussion irks me: the none too faint condescension towards the "watered-down" cultural studies types, and then the return to the pseudo-accreditation talk as though one can replace these inauthentic types with "trained anthropologists".

Don't buy into that sort of claptrap - masters programs eating into the honours market - Andrew. Leads nowhere.

If your universities ask you to do a job (get bums on seats) then do it. But let's not confuse that with what AAS or the intellectual domain of Anthropology could be about. Start there, and you end nowhere.

Gary.

Dr Gary Robinson, Director, CNAAR, Centre for North Australian and Asian Research

Dr Andrew Lattas [dralattas at ozemail.com.au](mailto:dralattas@ozemail.com.au)

Fri Oct 31 21:38:31 EST 2003

----- Original Message ----- From: Dr Andrew Lattas To: [aas at anu.edu.au](mailto:aas@anu.edu.au) Sent: Friday, October 31, 2003

5:57 PM Subject: Adding to the debate

Adding to the debate

Sorry I could not get to the conference, family matters intervened and I also became quite ill. I want to continue the discussion about AAS without falling into the school boy or school girl humour that has so recently filled these pages.

My critique of the AAS is a bit different from Barry Morris, though I support many of his points. I believe the AAS conference needs to internationalise itself more and also make more use of local scholars who are doing interesting, original work but who have become somewhat marginal to the AAS. I am thinking of scholars with an international reputation who have published important books and who I have yet to see at an AAS conference. They along with the international speakers should be invited not just to give a talk but to organise a session on their work or around a promising theme.

I have been to other one-off conferences organised by Jimmy Weiner and Alan Rumsey that had Roy Wagner and Beth Povinelli and the Doubled Edged Conferences organised by Gillian Cowlshaw that had Michael Taussig, Bruce Kapferer and Beth Povinelli. I believe the AAS needs to copy some of the format and initiative shown at these thematic conferences for its keynote and plenary sessions. I acknowledge that the whole conference should not be organised around one theme, but needs to incorporate the diverse initiatives of its members. I do not think that is currently happening. It seems that native title and the anthropologists working with Australian Aborigines have the upper hand as key note speakers and in plenary sessions. I know there are the exceptions and they have been that.

There is a problem with what is identified as democracy in the society when someone like myself or Lesley Jolly are told that we are free to organise our own conferences at Newcastle or Brisbane. Whilst I believe the host institution should play a significant role, more national resources and thought need to be put into the keynote speakers and plenary sessions. The allocation of money and resources should be determined by a national executive of senior scholars that incorporates and reflects the diversity of the discipline. It is not a question of telling people to go and form their own organisation (of consulting anthropologists) or of trying to create a stricter hierarchy of members.

I am advocating that in the interest of scholarly debate, we move partly away from the *laissez faire* model which currently operates as democracy. Here it is partly a question of having a national organisation that is willing not to be a prisoner to a local vision of anthropology (be that of Brisbane or Newcastle or an ethnographic region or a particular

branch of anthropology). Rotating the conference between cities and universities offers no guarantee of diversity or balance or even anything new.

Perhaps a committee could be set up each year to do this work which does take some time and thought, but not a huge amount. It is only two sessions that we are talking about. These should change over time to reflect the changing nature of the world and the changing nature of anthropology at a global level. The members of the committee should be appointed for three years so that they operate with a history of what has been done in the past and what could be done in the future.

I also believe that individuals who do not have titles for their proposed session, or abstracts for their session but are involved in fishing expeditions for papers and contributors should be made to wait until they can organise a theme and a topic. It is also a mistake to put postgraduate students straight out of the field into a national conference in the hope that their 20 minute talk will help them. It doesn't. At end of their PhD, when they have arguments and a position, yes.

It seems to me that the senior scholars in Australian anthropology have only occasionally faced any intellectual challenge to their vision of anthropology or their understanding of the intellectual field within which it operates. I believe the current state of the AAS to reflect that state of affairs. Yes, there are the usual whipping boys and girls in Australian anthropology, generally and safely, junior or marginal scholars. It is rare to hear an Australian professor critique the work of another Australian professor or at least not in public. I would like more debate introduced into the AAS, even if it does mean heated exchange. Thus I welcomed Jadran Mimica's critique of Annette Hamilton's managerialist vision of anthropology in her public address and note that he was not present at this year's AAS conference even though it was hosted by his own University. Yes there is something wrong.

I believe that preserving the healthy intellectual state of the discipline of anthropology at a national level is important given the eroding of disciplinary boundaries that is happening within many of the smaller universities, like where I work at Newcastle. At an institutional level one of the crises facing anthropology is the collapsing of honours courses into multi-disciplinary courses. You would never tell the physics department that it has to merge its undergraduate, honours and postgraduate courses with chemistry or maths but the current rationalisation processes do not acknowledge such subtleties in the social sciences, why can't anthropologists be put together not just with sociology but with social work and leisure and tourism.

The other major transformation is the emergence of MA courses which I believe are eating away at Honour programs and are producing students who really have an undergraduate understanding of anthropology and sometimes not even that.

The growth of the MA courses is related to a desire for a more "practical" anthropology which in turn is related to another profound change we are witnessing in Australian anthropology, namely the growth of consulting anthropology. It is changing what counts as fieldwork and the terms of intellectual debate. Consulting anthropologists are developing their own agendas and these are now starting to feature in the ordinary sessions of the AAS conference.

Finally I want to comment on what John Moreton said a while back. John has a habit of simplifying arguments down to certain ascribed essentials and these are made to fit clear cut dichotomies like "participation vs non-participation". He ignored the point I was making, that many anthropologists like myself participate whilst refusing to join. We do not consider ourselves freeloaders but quite hardworking members of the profession. I especially find problematic Moreton's style of argumentation, which is heavily crafted in metaphors dressed up as "humour" to which if you respond you are told: "it is a just joke, it is only comedy. Do not hold me accountable for my bad jokes or their implications." Well I believe that we need to cut through the crap that tries to pass itself off as wit and actually have a more serious discussion of why many anthropologists have yet to join their national organisation.

regards

Andrew Lattas

Julie Finlayson [Julie.Finlayson at anthropos.com.au](mailto:Julie.Finlayson@anthropos.com.au)
Sat Nov 1 15:13:20 EST 2003

I think debate about AAS and its future is healthy, necessary and I fully support it. And for those who were not present at the AAS AGM recently in Sydney or who are not current members I would point out that the AAS Executive is exploring the option of engaging someone to collate the substance of the AASNET discussion to prepare a position paper for a more focused consideration of options and recommendations for the Society's future form and actions. This initiative seems to me to be a positive outcome. And one reason it is positive and should be supported is that it brings the debate right inside the heart of the organisation where change can be legitimately considered and implemented.

However, we are still beset with whinging from the side lines and frankly I think those engaging in this form of 'dialogue' ought to critique their own position. How effective do you think you can be from outside the organisation? Who do you think will notice your views [apart from your own students]?

I see no point in engaging with the carping on about what form AAS SHOULD BE when those making these complaints are not members. Nor do I see any merit in the position that they would seem to take of refusal to join/attend UNTIL AAS/annual conferences operate in ways they say it SHOULD.

An organisation like AAS operates on the basis of the views of its MEMBERS as expressed through the AGM and through the initiatives of its members.

Unfortunately the sad reality is that if you want change you actually have to join up [and as Brian pointed out, in the appropriate membership category]. I have no doubt there is a certain 'ivory tower' luxury in taking the high moral ground of complaining about a certain sector of the profession, their views and their level of activity within the Society if you are not in that group nor even a member of AAS. But at the end of the day the only effective way to achieve any change on matters you don't like about AAS/annual conferences/dialogues, etc etc is to participate as a member. Indeed, I can't help wondering how genuine all this concern about the direction of AAS, professionalism,

conferences etc etc really is when the critics consistently refuse to become members of AAS. Otherwise so much hot air.....

Dr Julie D Finlayson Anthropos Consulting

John Morton [J.Morton at latrobe.edu.au](mailto:J.Morton@latrobe.edu.au)

Sat Nov 1 16:20:21 EST 2003

It's good that something concrete is happening with all this. And thanks to Dave Martin and Jeremy Beckett for kickstarting the two rushes. I just logged on to say something when I caught Julie Finlayson's post. I was going to say that it really is time for some sort of shakeup in the way AAS is shaped. It seems to me that there's a critical mass out there just dying for something to happen, so there should be formal moves soon to mobilise a process where we can change the way we do things. The archived material from the AAS discussions will be invaluable, so the more we get in there the better. Presumably, some sort of committee will have to deal with what might happen and then the membership will have to be canvassed. This, of course, raises Julie's point about the fundamental importance of people staying or becoming members. It also raises Brian Fegan's point about a membership drive. Perhaps AAS needs to do something in the latter line in a very concerted way, maybe producing a position statement about membership and how the organisation would like to develop in relation to attracting more people in a diverse profession. After all, if we are going to reflect an inclusive discussion, as has been happening here, we should also reflect an inclusive endorsement of any outcomes from that discussion. So, maybe the membership drive should take precedence over any proposed restructuring of the organisation and its arms. The idea is to make the whole thing more democratic in a properly participatory way, as opposed to democratic in a way that reproduces a kind of political cynicism model, with whole swags of people refusing to vote. This really is the bottom line, Andrew, even if it does simplify things. People need to join and be vigorous in their pursuit of their vision of AAS. You simply cannot expect people to take strictures about AAS seriously from people who have made themselves into eunuchs carping from the sidelines. The lively debate we want at conferences has to be reflected in the membership itself. Let's all get in there and dig.

It must be said, though, that there are occasionally some distressingly Stalinist turns in some quarters when full democratisation threatens a narrowness of vision. For example, when I initially tried to arrange the 2001 AAS conference forum on Roger Sandall's 'The Culture Cult', one invitee wrote to me and said that, if AAS was in the business of giving 'airplay' to Roger Sandall, then it had finally swayed them in their decision to not attend the conference. Part of the problem is that what counts as 'interesting' or 'exciting' work or debate is too often judged from a cloning mentality - 'What's really good and worth fostering is the kind of stuff that I do or like'. Of course, in this respect, internationalising AAS is no guarantee of opening it up intellectually. One can just as easily clone on a global scale. We need to more readily acknowledge the limitations of our individual and club-based biases here if we really aim for genuine pluralism, which is the only climate in which to get properly energetic debate. In certain respects, AAS is already like that. Incidentally, Jadran Mimica has a wonderful characterisation of intellectual debate that simply poses as debate: he calls it echolalia.

Finally, I guess I need to say something about humour. It's great that Andrew has finally appreciated the (school)boy in me. I'm now a bit younger than when I tried out a funny at Macquarie University that Brian Fegan thought was 'undergraduate'. I've read my Freud and I know that successful humour goes back a lot further than one's undergraduate or even late childhood years. All humour is infantile - and thank God for that, because without it we simply allow our mental arteries to harden into premature senility. Taking another pointer from Freud, I would say that sometimes a joke is just a joke. However, sometimes it's more than that and carries an admittedly aggressive critique - that's what the role of court jester is all about. I simply do not trust those who occupy the regal high ground and never let themselves be brought down to the level of others.

But at least the aggressive intent of a joke is usually pretty obvious. What about slips of the pen? And who is John MorEton anyway? Let me save anyone the trouble next time. If you really want to be clear, forget about inserting the 'e' - just drop the 't'. Then I'll try to cope.

;-) John

marthamac [marthamac at telstra.com](mailto:marthamac@telstra.com)

Tue Nov 4 11:15:18 EST 2003

Greetings from Vancouver! I had been meaning to participate in this conversation before I left Australia but have been somewhat at a loss what to say. It seems to me that all the major problems have been more or less delineated. Many of those who have academic jobs are overworked and have little time for the onerous tasks of administration of a society, managing websites, newsletters etc. It is difficult to attend conferences simply because of work pressures. I am extremely grateful to those who make the time and adhere strictly to the view that if you don't like the way a voluntary organisation is run then it is usually very easy to change it from inside. Simply offer to do the work involved. We are a small group within the academy and the main forms of employment outside are consultancies involving Native Title. The issue of Native Title and other forms of research involving Aboriginal people in Australia are politically fraught and tend to create an environment (politically and, in my opinion intellectually) where these issues are considered more important than others. Well, presumably they are for those who have to deal with them, but for those who do not, they often appear parochial. The politicization of the work also means that people cannot always write about subjects that they want to, that they have to be careful not raise criticisms of aboriginal institutions that might be used against them etc. etc. The cultural cringe factor that underscores some of the contributions is very hard to escape. It is really a numbers issue. Whenever I get the opportunity to give papers overseas the thing that is most gratifying is that there is a critical mass of people who are genuinely engaged with the the same issues as I am. Often in Australia it is hard to find a group of people who are working in the same area or familiar with the subject matter. So, I agree, organising conferences that are area-based or thematically coherent is great. But such things take time and commitment and money.

The lecture that Annette gave at Canberra was in some ways trying to deal with the numbers issue. In the current academic climate I think that we have to have pragmatic responses. We cannot really work to improve and expand anthropology as a discipline unless we do. I think that many of Andrew's criticisms are a simple reflection of the fact that not having a large(ish?) group of people who share theoretical interests and views

about what is intellectually important tends to make one feel marginal and defensive. I guess in some ways my own plenary lecture (which, incidentally Andrew, was about Melanesia and matters such as Australia's political and aid interests in the region) was saying something similar. Why, when Melanesia has been such a crucial region for anthropological research, when there are extraordinary and alarming things happening there that are (should be?) of compelling interest to Australian scholars, are the numbers of people working there dwindling? But, I don't think anyone responds well to self-righteousness and that is the way some of the criticisms come across. Just another thing about the need to acknowledge that inclusiveness is the only workable policy for AAS and Australian anthropology (and then I'll get off my bike). In any small discipline, mutual tolerance and respect are the only ways we can sustain our research if only because we now have to get grants to do it.

The bickering and lack of scholarly generosity that has marked some of the exchanges on AASnet is in many ways more destructive when it finds its way into ARC reports. I'm sure that many of us have either experienced or know other anthropologists who have submitted applications that have been shafted by one mean-minded and hostile report. Someone I know very well who has been involved in the selection for ARC grants told me that anthropologists are unique in their lack of generosity to each other. Most referees in other disciplines characteristically want others to flourish and so are far more tolerant of intellectual differences and do not take the opportunity to shoot someone down in flames fuelled by vitriol.

Martha Macintyre

David F. Martin [David.Martin at anu.edu.au](mailto:David.Martin@anu.edu.au)

Tue Nov 4 12:46:09 EST 2003

Colleagues, for some reason Jeremy's email to AASNet bounced back to me as list administrator, so I have re-submitted it.

David Martin

Andrew is not quite right in saying that the annual conferences (or at least the last one) are dominated by Aboriginalists. At a rough count, they numbered 28 out of 58. 28 is quite a lot, admittedly, but Aboriginalists make up quite large component of the profession. (Come to think of it, Andrew has published on the topic himself, and with some distinction!) However, at no time was this the only choice of sessions.

One could have gone through the entire conference without ever hearing about Aborigines.

Neither of this year's invited keynote speakers was an Aboriginalist.

There was one invited session which admittedly didn't go well because several participants couldn't make it. Among those invited, two out of six had Aboriginal experience, but they all had worked in other places as well. They could all be called

senior scholars. Discussion on ethics was also commissioned by the organising committee.

To track back to earlier conferences, last year's invited international speaker, Stanley Tambiah, was from Harvard, with a South Asian interest.

Annette Hamilton is an aboriginalist but also a SE Asianist: in any case, she was mainly speaking from the management perspective. The year before it was George Marcus from Rice - although 9.11 prevented him from coming, and myself (aboriginalist inter alia, but I spoke of it only in passing). In Perth the invited speaker (Canadian was it?) didn't show and David Trigger filled in, and we also had Peter Sutton. At UNSW it was Diane Bell (Aboriginalist) + Nic Thomas. Before that (from memory) wasn't it Prina Werbner?

Incidentally, the conferences which Andrew compares favourably to AAS also included a fair number of Aboriginalist papers. I suspect that Andrew's real grouch is with native title work, but even that wasn't all that evident this time, since they'd had their own conference beforehand.

Maybe it would be better to have input from the Executive, say regarding keynote speakers, and some thematic sessions. Now we all have email it shouldn't be too hard to achieve the degree of liaison. We still need to move the conferences from city to city, and this requires a host committee.

However, don't suppose that this won't start a groundswell against elitism.

But if it leads to livelier conferences, so be it.

Jeremy

Jeremy Beckett. 34 Rose St, Birchgrove, NSW, Australia. 2041.

Dr Andrew Lattas [dralattas at ozemail.com.au](mailto:dralattas@ozemail.com.au)
Fri Nov 7 11:07:13 EST 2003

I wanted to stay away from this debate but Jeremy's last email calls for a response. I also wanted to clarify my own position I understand from friends that Gerald Sider gave a very good paper and I support the AAS in taking up other indigenous issues apart from those in Australia, though it does still fit into a particular kind of agenda which has occupied a prominent place in the AAS I am also pleased that Martha Macintyre gave a plenary talk because I think she is a very good anthropologist. I very much enjoyed her paper, which she gave last year in Canberra, on new forms of policing in PNG. I witnessed the same use of the riot squad in support of the Malaysian timber companies in West New Britain.

I nevertheless do not accept that the AAS has been as wide as it could be in terms of reflecting the diversity of the discipline. It is possible maybe to classify Annette Hamilton as an Asianist and say that Jeremy Beckett should not be counted as an Aboriginalist because he spoke on something else, the history of anthropology in Australia. This helps to take away the names of two of the most senior Aboriginal specialists from an

otherwise embarrassing long list (that I have personal knowledge of) and that includes: Jeffrey Stead, David Trigger, Peter Sutton, Diane Bell and Hal Wotten.

The picture which still emerges is that the anthropologists of Australian Aboriginals and their ethnographic concerns and their vision of anthropology dominates the keynote speeches.

I acknowledge that Tambiah and George Marcus do introduce some diversity and I believe there should be wider consultation and use of personal networks to ensure that is developed further.

I have a couple of points to make about Martha's recent contribution to the discussion. I believe that in a context where there is little public disagreements between anthropologists (certainly not the senior anthropologists) the processes of evaluation and sorting of colleagues does not disappear, it just shifts to the anonymity of referee reports and private conversations and dinner parties. A public suppression of critique just displaces the domain of its operation into safe contexts where aggrieved individuals cannot respond.

On another minor note of digression, I disagree with Martha's analysis of how the cultural cringe operates in Australian society. My own experience is that the critique of the cultural cringe has become an institutionalised part of Australian intellectual life. I have been to meetings of an Australian journal where I have seen how it encouraged a kind of intellectual nationalism (if I say parochialism, people will get angry) that assumes: "there are so many interesting things happening in Australia, this is what we need to encourage, we do not need to be copying what other overseas people are doing." Well I do not buy that.

Anthropology is changing, much of what many of us teach in anthropology has changed, the global context of Australian anthropology has changed, we need to more engage those changes in the AAS.

regards Andrew

John Morton [J.Morton at latrobe.edu.au](mailto:J.Morton@latrobe.edu.au)
Tue Nov 4 13:00:55 EST 2003

A very minor point for the record - the speaker who couldn't make it to Perth was Anne Salmond, from New Zealand.

John Morton

Dr Andrew Lattas [dralattas at ozemail.com.au](mailto:dralattas@ozemail.com.au)
Tue Nov 4 16:24:43 EST 2003

I thought I had been careful to state that I was referring to the keynote speeches and plenary sessions which I believe have been overly dominated by Aboriginalists and native title specialists. I was not referring to the ordinary sessions in the AAS which I think should be left to individuals to nominate and organise

I cannot comment on this year's AAS conference because I did not hear the papers and the web site was too poorly organised to know what was happening at Sydney.

However I do remember two other AAS keynote papers that I heard at previous conferences

Reflections on the Past, Present and Future Roles of Anthropology in Aboriginal Land Councils and Native Title Representative Bodies, Keynote Address presented by Jeff Stead at the AAS Annual Conference, October 3-5 2002.

and another by Hal Wootten on native title in Adelaide

I am not suggesting that we all stop writing and thinking about Aboriginalist issues but that at a national level there could be more planning of what else it might be worthwhile to cover. Here I do not mean topics that I am working on.

Perhaps something on religious fundamentalism, I remember a very interesting exchange in Canberra between Tambiah, Kalpana, Sanjay and Rohan on the nature of violence in India and Sri Lanka

Perhaps something on Australia's new approach to foreign aid and the Pacific - the Pacific Solution, the Solomons, PNG aid

Perhaps something on new more militant forms of Islam in SE Asia

Perhaps inviting overseas Aboriginal specialists or those who might be working on related indigenous issues

I am sure people could suggest other topics that address the changing nature of the world in which we live. Invited overseas speakers should be encouraged not just to give a keynote speech but to organise a session. The senior scholars in Australian anthropology who do not attend the AAS could be invited to do the same.

I should also state that I have decided to join the AAS and not because I believe it will change. My reason for believing it will not change come not from listening to the noisy inept defences of the status quo (we do not want to clone the world, you are just hot air whinging and carping, we will excommunicate you) or from noting those who are mounting those defences. My reason for believing it will not change come from the defining silence of its members. How to interpret that silence (as apathy, overwork, a sad world, resistance) has been what a great deal of these emails have been about.

My reason for deciding to join is that I believe that those who do not want change also want a convenient excuse for not listening to those who are not members even though there is the fraudulent offer of being invited to speak - so as to find out why anthropologists are not AAS members. There is the largess of appearing to want dialogue I can warn you all that this offer is a trick I have been quite honest in reporting not just my opinions but also of my friends who are also not members and some of them are much more scathing than myself about the AAS.

I am going into the field soon and will be removing myself from this debate so I can do some writing.

cheers Andrew

John Morton [J.Morton at latrobe.edu.au](mailto:J.Morton@latrobe.edu.au)

Tue Nov 4 20:25:34 EST 2003

Oh for Christ's sake! I would actually like EVERY anthropologist in Australia, not to mention those with any kind of vested interest from overseas, to join AAS, so that the organisation can build itself into something pretty vigorous. The most embarrassing thing about attending AAS conferences in recent years is to see the AGM reduced to a pitiful bunch of hangers-on-at-the-last-minute-to-deal-with-core-business. There is something symptomatic about this which gestures towards the state of the discipline as a whole. Too often do we look (to ourselves and to others) Micky Mouse.

Andrew, I (and I suspect many others) am (are) very seriously glad that you are joining AAS. Please do your best to persuade those who you find to be more scathing of the organisation to also do so. There's no trick.

(Jeez, why should I and 'my kind' alone don the mantle of Arfur Daley?) All you (and others) have to do is to have a good idea about what you want Australian anthropology to be. We can fight all the way to a corner and maybe someone will have to retire from the ring sometimes, but only for a while. AAS is really just a big seminar venue, although the issues and outcomes are admittedly a bit different.

Dialogue encompasses everything between a good old-fashioned stoush and a feel-good agreement. Agreeing to disagree is a bloody good way to proceed. Bring it on! Incidentally, this is not just a message to Andrew. Any chance that we can raise this organisation from receding half- to ongoing full-life? Please, let's get that membership drive going asap.

John Morton

Bruce White [bruceanthro at yahoo.com](mailto:bruceanthro@yahoo.com)

Tue Nov 4 23:14:01 EST 2003

Dear AASNetters

In case it hasn't already been suggested, discussed and/or dismissed out of hand .. I'd thought I might suggest AAS membership consider also making provision within the constitution for some form of corporate or institutional membership?? I've seen other corporations/constitutions make effective use of this sort of provision!

If whole research institutions, corporations, companies and/or Departments (ie those dominantly DOING anthropology) could join themselves as members (with all their directors, their staff etc) the membership reach and representativeness of AAS might be able to increase rapidly and dramatically across Australia (not to mention the possibilities of corporate/institutional membership fees?)

Just a suggestion .. to be thrown into the debate/discussion/review..

Cheers

Bruce White Emic Research

Barry Morris [Barry.Morris at newcastle.edu.au](mailto:Barry.Morris@newcastle.edu.au)

Wed Nov 5 10:46:32 EST 2003

Dear John, I find your backflip on the discussion truly breathtaking. We have all witnessed Andrew being accused of all manner of things for the last week or so. Little discussion of the issues he raised and a number of personal attacks. Was there anything positive said in relation to his comments for change? Indeed, I formed the impression we were dealing with Fortress AAS, preoccupied only with change in the form of endlessly shuffling the categories of AAS citizenship. But I wake up this morning and find that all is well. We should all agree with Andrew and how crazy we would be not to do so. Truly amazing. regards, barry

Gillian Cowlshaw [gillian.cowlshaw at uts.edu.au](mailto:gillian.cowlshaw@uts.edu.au)

Wed Nov 5 11:52:12 EST 2003

Colleagues, A picture is beginning to emerge of AAS and the conferences both run by overworked martyrs, who are selflessly determined to keep the organisation going at any cost, and unwilling to defend the result. Perhaps a mass resignation is in order!

Is it possible for the executive to appoint a committee to provide the thinking and planning for future conferences? That committee to consist of a range of interested people with varied interests who are willing to put some work into thematic and topical issues and to inveigle some of the marginalised talent back to the conference at least, if not to AAS. We do not need punitive measures, but enticement such as the promise of interesting things happening. There are models for interesting conferences around (eg. Charles Darwin University's symposium series this year) but it does take some investment of time and thought, all made easier with email.

The idea would be to invite exciting, innovative scholars, from where ever they are, to enhance what is already on offer. I think this was Andrew's idea, and I've not heard any objections to it.

Could someone explain to me (I presume others need to know) how the conference is financed now < is it the case that AAS takes no responsibility any more, and the host University has to pay for everything? Is this why the cost escalated?

Gillian

James Weiner [james.weiner at anu.edu.au](mailto:james.weiner@anu.edu.au)

Thu Nov 6 16:56:40 EST 2003

Dear Colleagues

The current conversation over the future of the AAS has now spawned over 60 pages of comments. All of them touch on at least part of the truth of the situation we all confront and obviously all involved take this situation very seriously.

I agree with Martha McIntyre that there are too few of us and that we must act ecumenically if we are to have any kind of AAS at all. But having said this, I think we must take due regard of the different, and in some cases incompatible, interests that are represented and depicted in this conversation. I don't propose to identify all of them right now, but to me the most important are the following:

AAS *contra* Anthropology

Andrew and Barry take the interest of the discipline of anthropology seriously. And they imply that it is not at all clear whether the interests of the AAS as a representative body of anthropologists and others is co-extensive with the interests of the discipline. I myself am inclined to support this. More and more anthropologists work in multi-disciplinary project-oriented groups, or in amalgamated Social Science/Humanities Schools of one sort or another. Many anthropologists have welcomed the move to trans-disciplinarity. The AAS has to represent the interests of many anthropologists who have accepted this abdication of anthropology from disciplinary independence—and I acknowledge that many of them have cogent reasons for doing so-- which I would hope they are willing to defend in public debate. But I have never been clear about how giving up anthropology's disciplinary integrity at the institutional level has been thought to be good for anthropology's future. Suffice it to say that I am unclear how "multi-disciplinarity" can occur without there being clear and healthy "disciplinarity" to start with. But it has happened and it is not possible to un-do it at the present. I have much more to say about this, but I leave it at that for now.

Practising v. Academic Anthropologists

Some time I ago I proposed an AAS sponsored debate on the relation between practising and academic anthropology. I suppose it was an idea whose time had not yet come, or perhaps it was because I was not a member of AAS.

I suggested at the time that we might employ the British annual debate in anthropology (which I was involved in as both participant and editor when I was at Manchester) as a formula—to have at least one officially sanctioned debate at the AAS conference. It's a way for the national association to take its topical and intellectual pulse on a regular basis. By the way, has anyone else considered that we might not be able to sustain an annual meeting and that one meeting every two years might be worth considering?

Practising anthropologists do not have institutional support to attend conferences. If they are as busy as I am, they find it very difficult to put time aside to write papers or do their own research. You can encourage them all you like to attend, but they will have still these difficulties. Julie Finlayson complained that when she was President, as a full-time consultant she had no institutional support to aid her with the job of President. This will disadvantage consultants further from taking leadership roles in the AAS and contribute to their further alienation. This goes doubly for anthropologists like Francis Claffey in full-time employment. If we are talking about a large minority of consulting anthropologists, or—if you consider all non-academic anthropologists, perhaps even a majority of anthropologists (as Annette Hamilton's keynote address indicated)—then we have serious issues of accountability.

However, I agree with Annette Hamilton that even if it is the majority form of employment, consulting anthropology cannot be the tail that wags the academic anthropological dog. Although I see some movement of consulting anthropologists back into the academy (like in CAEPR recently), on both short- and long-term bases, here at ANU and elsewhere, I wonder whether members of the AAS can think how we can increase the opportunities for full-time consultants to engage in academic activities. They have to be able to see something intellectually and academically challenging in what they do as contract anthropologists. But there is another slightly different point also-- as it is now, some of the discussion indicates that few people really have an idea about what "native title anthropology" is and that its practitioners may not have been effectively portraying this to the rest of the anthropological community. I know one thing--no anthropology done in this country is subject to as much thorough scrutiny as native title research. Do those not involved in it directly have the luxury of ignoring it, given that it has the potential to greatly affect the way in which the public views anthropology?

Management vs. Academics

Someone in this conversation brought up the issue of the academic union. I wonder whether the NTEU represents equally well the now more divergent interests of Heads of Schools and Heads of Division vs. other academic staff. The Management corps of the Universities now seems very much at odds in most cases with the interests of academic staff. As Heads of Schools all over Australia become more complicit in implementing the policy of the managerial strata of Universities, their interests will diverge from their colleagues. I think it is important to recognize the success that at least two professors of anthropology, at ANU and UWA, have had in maintaining the independence and success of anthropology in their universities.

But more generally, the University is promoting a kind of entrepreneurial leadership where, again, the interests of the discipline are not as important as taking advantage of externally-funded research opportunities. I wonder how healthy it is for us to have our intellectual life directed in this way. It appears as if more and more young anthropologists coming into positions in the University are doing so via short-term externally funded projects of this sort.

Gary Robinson mentioned the difference between what working for the University now entails (getting bums on seats, finding funds to pay your own salary, etc.) and whatever it is we may want the AAS to do and protect for us. If these two things diverge any more, then the AAS will have a harder time representing anthropologists' interests.

All of these different aspects of divergent interests need to be understood for the contribution they make to the current malaise which all of us feel to some degree or another. They come together at different points in critical ways—For example, if we do not promote the learning of basic anthropological methodology and theory at both the undergraduate and graduate level, we will be bequeathing to consulting anthropology a generation of badly trained practitioners, the legal consequences alone of which should give us pause. The more non-anthropology Honours students we continue to admit to the higher degree programme, the more we contribute to this problem. This is a problem at the level of disciplinarity which ultimately affects the strength and vitality of the AAS itself, and will affect the future relationship between academic and practising anthropologists-- although perhaps not immediately nor directly.

I have previously allowed my membership in AAS to lapse. As a result of the various exhortations in the past few weeks, I have once again re-applied for membership. But it

will be impractical and unreasonable to press people to rejoin an AAS that they perceive does not serve their interests.

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Tanya King tanyajking@hotmail.com
Sat Nov 8 03:55:20 EST 2003

G'day all,

Andrew Lattas's comments re: pgrads presenting at the AAS conference, prompted me to reflect on the discomfort I have felt since Sydney.

I also believe that individuals who do not have titles for their proposed session, or abstracts for their session but are involved in fishing expeditions for papers and contributors should be made to wait until they can organise a theme and a topic. It is also a mistake to put postgraduate students straight out of the field into a national conference in the hope that their 20 minute talk will help them. It doesn't. At end of their PhD, when they have arguments and a position, yes.<

I agree that there needs to be a strong commitment to the quality of material accepted for presentation at the conference, and that a PhD candidate might not have such material 5 minutes after they step off a plane from the field. What concerned me, however, was the division between postgraduates and 'other' anthropologists, implicit in the comments. It hints at a divisiveness evident throughout the discipline as a whole, between those who can speak with legitimacy and those whose voices are marginalised due to their rank, or history or affiliation or personality or whatever.

Though I enjoyed Sydney in many ways, I came away from it feeling disillusioned, feeling like there was no legitimate place for postgraduate contribution to Anthropology, and feeling like our discipline is stagnating because of it. It was not just the limited pgrad participation in sessions, but the breathtaking lack of attendance and participation in bar-side-banter. How many postgraduates from Uni Syd attended? I can think of one. I did not feel like an apprentice - I felt like a spectator.

It seems that we - as a discipline - are suffering something of an identity crisis, and that it is being left to the "grey beards" to clarify our role both as theorists and practitioners (regardless of their area of interest). While I admire these people immensely, there needs to be a space where supportive, constructive, professional, challenging and critical but non-judgemental debate between all anthropologists - postgraduates, young academics, consulting anthropologists, 'old schoolers', etc. - can occur. The lack of collegiate generosity Martha Macintyre alluded to must be redressed.

Creating this 'space' is a realistic goal. The most logical locale for this space to be fostered is the AAS. Which brings me to membership. Perhaps a concerted effort to recruit postgrads (as well as other non-members) to the AAS, and to AAS-net, is a step in the right direction. This would broaden and vitalise the scope of debate within Anthropology, and impute longer term financial benefits to the society as postgrad members become fellows. Further, those who feel they have a legitimate place in the society are more likely to contribute positively to its perpetuation.

Tanya

MUSHARBASH Yasmine [Yasmine.Musharbash at tsra.gov.au](mailto:Yasmine.Musharbash@tsra.gov.au)

Sun Nov 9 17:40:41 EST 2003

Dear Tanya, Andrew, and all,

that comment of Andrew's about pgrads has been grating on me for a while and I would like to add my voice to Tanya's:

There have been sessions expressively for pgrads such as the one on multi-sited ethnography organised by Jimmy Weiner at the 1998 AAS, and others organised by pgrads which ended up with mainly pgrad presenters, such as Kalissa's and Roberta's "Eat Me!" panel at the 2001 AAS. They were all fun, stimulating, and the discussions were great (see some TAJA special volumes!). At other times pgrad papers are sprinkled across a variety of sessions. No matter whether in separate panels or not, in my view it has often been postgrad papers especially that have made attendance at the AAS conferences worthwhile. Yes, once in a while a 'grey beard' or a 'grey beardless' dazzles with some wonderful & thought-provoking new paper, but as often it is the pgrad papers that trigger provocative thoughts and lively discussion. Maybe not on the deepest of all theoretical planes and maybe simply because the field is so close still and they are ethnographically 'fresh'.

It is also through the pgrad papers more than anything else that the oh-so-popular distinction between Aboriginalists and Others tends to break down (once in a while). It seems to me that current pgrad generations may be an example of an open-mindedness that all could benefit from.

I have just finished my PhD (as a true blue camp-living, goanna-hunting, barefoot-walking, mosquito-bitten Aboriginalist if that is what you want to call me) but through those years have listen to, learned from and discussed anthropology with other pgrads who study fishermen, diving women, pastoralists, cranio-facial units, tourism, bureaucracies, coups, violence, masculinity, etc and who undertook their fieldwork in Korea, in Sumatra, in PNG, in Germany, in Adelaide, Vanuatu etc. These discussions were and are very relevant to my own work and I hope I have contributed a little to theirs.

I think the less attention we pay to differences between postgrads and (what? real?) anthropologists and between Aborginalists and non-Aboriginalists the more we will be able to remember what anthropology is all about and the closer we will get to creating that space Tanya talked about:

"where supportive, constructive, professional, challenging and critical but non-judgemental debate between all anthropologists - postgraduates, young academics, consulting anthropologists, 'old schoolers', etc. - can occur."

Cheers, Yasmine

Yasmine Musharbash Anthropologist Native Title Office Torres Strait Regional Authority

marthamac [marthamac at telstra.com](mailto:marthamac@telstra.com)

Sun Nov 9 19:32:02 EST 2003

I agree with Anthony, postgraduates should be encouraged to participate. I have heard postgrads give papers at many international conferences - at AAA in the US and at several conferences in the UK. As a supervisor I think it is a responsibility to assist any postgrad in preparing a presentation - but the skills of defending an argument and answering questions are ones best developed in real situations.

I heard two very good papers by postgrads at this year's AAS conference - which given that I did not attend every session I could have seems OK to me. As a postgraduate I was given the opportunity to participate in two conferences on the Kula, and I think at that time Shirley Campbell, Debbora Battaglia and Maria Lepowsky had not completed their theses either. Preparing papers for a thematic conference which was going to have people like Edmund Leach, Nancy Munn and Roy Wagner in attendance certainly ensured that one went well-prepared. Given the need for people to be thinking of publications and applications for post-docs, I think all postgrads should be encouraged to participate in conferences. If a supervisor thinks that the student is not at a stage where he or she can deliver an interesting paper, then they can either discourage participation or help them get it up to scratch.

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Mon Nov 10 13:22:15 EST 2003

I agree with every word and I feel I should warn members that they should expect a rise in conference price in 2005 when we put the conference on in Brisbane. This is in part because of funding restrictions in our University and in part because it is being organised by anthropologists who are not working in a department of anthropology. Under those circumstances and in these straitened times it might be expected that our budget controllers might ask "Why are we funding this?" We in the AAS of course all know the answer but its still an argument that has to be made. A float would help immeasurably. For another conference where I served on the technical committee this year the float was \$10,000. Thomas?

Lesley

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Thomas Reuter [thomasr at unimelb.edu.au](mailto:thomasr@unimelb.edu.au)

Mon Nov 10 19:58:57 EST 2003

Dear Colleagues, in particular response to Lesley and Gaynor's comments on the relationship between the AAS and the annual AAS conference:

For some years now, the AAS has devolved all financial responsibility for the annual conference to the host department. The HOD of the host department, in volunteering to

take on the task of organizing the conference, was assumed to be both able and willing to take on this financial responsibility.

There were two reasons for taking this approach:

1) if the organizers are fully responsible for balancing their budget, there is unlikely to be any mismanagement, and if there is, members do not have to foot the bill. Alternatively, the AAS would have to become much more interventionist in looking over the shoulders of the organizers, which would be highly impractical.

2) departments were nevertheless expected to accept (and plan for) some losses in view of the fact that they also would benefit from showcasing themselves by hosting a national event.

3) by and large, the conference has produced only a modest deficit for the organizers, and sometimes no deficit at all. In the case of Sydney, Gaynor is reporting that the conference did pay for itself in the end, even without a subsidy from the school, faculty or university - which is a worst case scenario. In the end, it is always just a matter of setting the cost of registration at a level that will ensure the organizers are not out of pocket by very much. The difference a sizable subsidy from the host department or university makes (as in the case of the 2002 conference at ANU) is that it reduces the cost of registration and attracts more people that way. It also allows for bigger spending on keynote speakers, possibly from overseas, and on special events, such as the free cocktail reception at ANU.

In short, the policy made sense. Be that as it may, the policy also has been modified recently. This modification was not a 180-degree turn, however, so much as a refinement of the existing policy.

In a lengthy discussion, the Sydney organizers convinced me that some of the membership fees of the AAS should go towards supporting the most important event for members, the annual conference. The AAS executive agreed, and a proposal was put to and endorsed by members, at the last AGM. It was decided that henceforth, the AAS will pay a maximum of \$2000 towards the cost of inviting a keynote speaker (with some accountability clauses attached).

The amount was set to be larger than just a symbolic contribution, and yet not too large, which would put strain on the budget of the AAS and prevent us from pursuing other worthwhile initiatives, such as the thesis prize.

Lesley's suggestion of a \$10000 float is simply not possible from a budgetary perspective, not sensible in terms of financial management, nor do I think it is necessary. Whatever the circumstances, the hosts should be able to make the books balance because they have the freedom to set the registration fee (so long as they do not make a profit). The real challenge for the hosts is to make the conference cheaper and more attractive than previous AAS conferences or comparable conferences of other societies, by putting some money into it themselves, by getting sponsorship from within and without their university, and by using the available funds in a cost-effective manner.

The change in policy, I believe, has established a good balance between AAS financial involvement and acknowledgement of the conference on the one hand, while also encouraging the host departments to act with fiscal responsibility and accountability.

Some members raised other concerns about the conference, to do with quality control. I do not wish to go into any great detail. Nevertheless, some comments may be helpful.

First, I do not think there is a major quality control issue, because the hosts are in a position where the failure of the conference would damage the reputation of their department. In short, the hosts are likely to do the very best they can, and from a practical perspective, that is the very best there is.

I would like to suggest, however, that the best way to greater quality assurance is increased competition. If some members feel they could do a better job at running a conference than others have in the past, please see your HOD and propose that your department should host the next conference. Then put forward your proposal at the HODs meeting at the next AAS conference, or approach the AAS executive in advance of the meeting.

In response to the current AASnet discussion on a host of other matters:

I am very pleased to see this debate, even if I do not agree with everyone's point of view. I have refrained from intervening, though I had to bite my tongue on a few occasions. The reason is that I do not wish to direct the debate, or to preempt its outcome. Other members of the executive have taken the same approach.

Nevertheless, we have been listening closely, and the issues raised in this discussion will certainly be identified and addressed, insofar as we have the capacity and resources to do so.

One general comment. Members, it seems, are not always fully aware of the activities of the executive and of the current state of AAS affairs. For example, some of the issues about membership categories have already been dealt with or, at least, have been formally identified. This lack of information is not for lack of transparency: Please refer to the 2003

AGM minutes and presidential report (available either on the AAS web site or in the next newsletter) if you wish to know what the executive done over the last year and what we intend to do in the future.

Some of these future initiatives certainly will be responses to issues raised by members in the current debate on AASnet.

Best regards Dr Thomas Reuter President, AAS

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Mon Nov 10 13:38:49 EST 2003

I want to speak in support of Tanya and Yasmine's letters.

I'm not sure what exactly is at issue here, since there were some pgrads giving papers at Sydney and they were among the best I saw, but a few thoughts nonetheless.

I don't see anything wrong with full participation in paper giving from p-grads who are just back from research, about to go to research, developing proposals for research, or just read an interesting book and have some novel thoughts about it. Since when is it necessary to be able to produce a keynote speech level paper for concurrent sessions, where conference goers have several choices? (And I have seen some awful keynotes) If there were rules that papers needed to be well thought out, well researched, well presented, or polished, we'd all be in trouble. The AAS should belong to all and should be seen as an organisation that all post-grads join as part of being serious about anthropology.

The purpose of a convention should be to bring the national section of anthropology together to discuss ideas and research that is important to us, get to know other people interested in the same things and build collaborative relationships with them, to test out new work, to polish old work, to let the national section know who we are and what we are thinking, to learn who is out there and who needs to be listened to in the coming period, to get our travel paid for by giving papers and to get another little line on our CV. In general to take stock and advance ourselves, our colleagues, our students and Australian anthropology as a whole. I am sure I have missed a few, but as far as I am concerned, all the above mentioned reasons suggest that giving these papers is probably more important for post-grads than graybeards. What better way of learning to be anthropologists than performance with other anthropologists.

I admit that all things equal, if I saw a session in the program that was entirely famous anthropologists I would choose it over postgrads. Status, hierarchy and experience are hugely important in this profession, but if it is something that interests me by pgrads, I never have a second thought about choosing it over a session with a bunch of PhD's. My sense is that most people who attend the AAS choose what session to attend based on academic interest and social connection, not how accomplished or credentialed the presenters are. In fact some of the most interesting papers at this last meeting were given by post-grads. If nothing else, post grad sessions are exactly the place to look for new talent to incorporate into future sessions, edited volumes, and special issues (as Yasmine pointed out). They are also places for students to showcase their work to people cruising for new talent. If our students are going to compete in the profession internationally, let them get started early at all the little tricks and tribulations of giving a paper at meetings, including assembling thematic sessions out of completely unrelated papers, cajoling people with useful papers into giving them, writing abstracts before you have any idea what the paper is about, finding ways of diplomatically excluding colleagues whose work is not up to par or really does not fit the topic, bringing in a mate who needs to attend for the CV line as a discussant, or drawing a big crowd by convincing a famous graybeard that she should be a discussant for a bunch of smart and interesting nobodies. Some of the most successful sessions I organised as a post-grad were based on managing to convince an important scholar that she only had to show up, listen and make a few remarks. These are some of the little things that make up a successful academic career, whether you are a genius, a moron or, like most of us, somewhere in between.

Anybody who has the courage to stand up and speak for 15 minutes is ready to present and there is no rule that anybody has to attend or stay. If they are good, we will always

find a way to bring them in and collaborate with them, which is how they get noticed and have their ideas taken seriously by more than just their supervisor and their committee? Even the grayest graybeard needs to know what the future of the profession will look like.

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Gaynor Macdonald [gaynor.macdonald at anthropology.usyd.edu.au](mailto:gaynor.macdonald@anthropology.usyd.edu.au)

Mon Nov 10 14:16:27 EST 2003

First, to Gillian's question regarding the conference funding. The AAS does not take financial responsibility for the conference anymore. This has devolved to the conference committee (i.e. host institution). This was the case last year and not why the cost 'escalated' this year. This year was the first time (that I am aware of, except for a conflict some years ago) that a host university has not made a contribution of any kind - at University, Faculty or School level. In addition, we pay for all venues used on our campus. We used Dept funds to get going until registrations came in and the budget was touch and go as so many always register on the day and not before. However, because we also had a well-attended (and despite Andrew's remarks) what many clearly saw as a successful conference, we balanced the books, including one overseas fare, and were able to reimburse the Dept. However, this is still the cheapest conference I attend and, while it would be good to keep it this way, it is going to become harder to do so in the present university user-pays environment.

However, I have suggested to Thomas that a 'float' from the AAS to start each conference off would be of great assistance for the future. And I also feel that some of my membership fee should be going towards it - it is still the main reason (to me) for that fee.

More generally, great efforts went into trying to get a representative program and several people were contacted to run sessions, some of whom responded. We had a good roll up of our own post-grads, several of whom gave papers and I would like to think all post-grads could see the conference as a supportive environment in which to experiment as well as give end of term publishable contributions. It was hard to see a qualitative difference in many sessions between post-grad and 'senior' contributions and I agree with Yasmine's comments.

I am certainly appreciative that so many people have personally let me know they enjoyed the conference at Sydney. Otherwise, I would be inaccurately interpreting some of the current debate as a very negative reflection of our efforts here at Sydney. I wonder what some of the commentators on the AASNet expect. I will look forward to some of them putting up their hands for this incredibly time consuming task for which there is little reward and little thanks.

I suspect it can also be shown that the behind the scenes organising is usually being done by a female staff member or student. We were no exception! Perhaps that also influences this debate.

Gaynor Member of the hard working and successful 2003

AAS Conference Committee from Sydney