

support for anthropologists to participate in climate application research, thereby fostering the formation of the first network of “climate anthropologists,” including the authors of the December In Focus series.

Among the projects that have benefited from HDGC support is the Climate Forecasting and Agricultural Resources (CFAR) project. Since 1998, the CFAR project has worked in several communities in Burkina Faso in collaboration with the national meteorological service, the national agricultural research institution (INERA) and the development NGO Plan International. The long-term nature of the project enabled the research team to spend considerable time in the field, developing strong relationships with research communities and a longer-term perspective on local dynamics of vulnerability and adaptation. Building on climate science advances in the ability to forecast seasonal rainfall in the Sudan-Sahel region, the CFAR project explored the potential applications of such information among agriculturalists and pastoralists of Burkina Faso. The CFAR team tested different ways of representing and disseminating the forecasts, including participatory workshops, radio broadcasts and trained extension agents. Research findings show that, contrary to what climate scientists believed, producers were able to grasp the probabilistic nature of the forecasts, demonstrating a nuanced understanding that was grounded in their own knowledge and empirical observations. Despite resource limitations, producers had a wide repertoire of adaptive options for incorporating the forecasts into agricultural decisions. Social networks played key roles in relaying the information throughout the communities, but information was managed in ways that excluded certain social groups and served political purposes. Findings from the research are published in interdisciplinary journals such as *Climate Research*, *Agricultural Systems* and *Society and Natural Resources*, as well as in edited volumes.

Our column welcomes all materials of interest to C&A members. Please direct inquiries to Ronald Rich at rdrich95@sbcglobal.net.

Evolutionary Anthropology Society

JOHN P ZIKER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Evolutionary Anthropology and Religion

Evolutionary anthropologists are particularly interested in religious behavior across human societies, using comparative analysis and empirical studies to better understand the origin, function and structure of religious beliefs, including the underlying cognitive underpinnings of religion. Most sociocultural anthropology textbooks go along with the assertion that religion is a central part of a society's culture and identity, providing understandings of origin, purpose and morality. The

problem is that religions more often than not prescribe military conflict with nonbelievers. What is good and moral for the in-group is not applicable for the out-group. Overcoming this evolutionary conundrum is one of the major issues of our time.

A number of recent publications by evolutionarily-minded scholars should attract the attention of anthropologists dealing with the topic of religion.

The God Delusion (2006) by Richard Dawkins has grabbed the public's attention (eg, BBC series, The Daily Show, thousands of reader reviews and an interview clip on Amazon.com). Dawkins illustrates how religion works as a negative force in social interaction (eg, worsening war, fostering discrimination and justifying abuse). He recounts other ways to appreciate the wonder of the complexity of the universe and to foster morality in social interactions. Following his own concept of cultural evolution (selection of idea units and complexes, known as memes), Dawkins argues that religion develops in “organized” settings as a result of survival and reproduction of particular religious memes in a pool of religious ideas (2006:201). In earlier times (ie, autochthonous society), Dawkins asserts that religious memes survived because of their appeal to universal attributes of the human psyche, indicating that the meme theory of religion and the by-product theory overlap. Both theories speculate that the human mental architecture that allows for and facilitates religious behavior evolved for other purposes, and that religion *per se* is not an adaptation.

An exponent of the evolutionary by-product theory of religion is Scott Atran. In his well-written and cogent book *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (2002), Atran critically assesses a variety of approaches to religion including theories of hardwiring, so-called sociobiology, memes and group selection. Atran points to and explicates a series of universal cognitive domains in human psychology, such as the comprehension of the agency of animate objects, which allows for counterfactual religious claims to be acceptable, if not attractive, to people in solving existential problems. He also gives credence to the role of religion in encouraging costly sacrifice in getting people to commit to social order. Thus, beginning from an evolutionary by-product perspective, Atran describes how religion can facilitate social cohesion.

Another recent publication along these lines is David Sloan Wilson's book *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (2002). For Wilson, religion and underlying proximate mechanisms in individuals help coordinate human behavior so that social groups can act together. Contrary to Dawkins and Atran, in this view religion is an evolutionary adaptation that operates on the group or societal level. Wilson also describes psychological abilities, such as forgiveness, as necessary evolutionary underpinnings for religious behavior.

A very recent publication illustrates the heightened appreciation of evolutionary perspectives on religion across disciplines. *The Evolution of Religion: Studies, Theories, and Critiques* (Joseph Bulbulia, Richard Sosis, Erica Harris, Russell Genet, Cheryl Genet and Karen Wyman, eds; 2008) is packed with 50 short and readable essays by scholars in a variety of fields, summarizing studies, theories and critiques of evolutionary approaches to religion. David Sloan Wilson (2008:23-9) outlines six major evolutionary hypotheses (three adaptive, three non-adaptive) that can be applied to religion. Former EAS President William Irons (2008:51-7) describes the commitment theory of the evolution of religion that specifies individual benefits in the context of inter-group competition. Lyle Steadman and Craig Palmer (2008:319-25) emphasize the descendant-leaving advantages of religious traditions through encouragement of kinship behavior to distant and non-kin. In contrast to both, psychologist Lee Kirkpatrick (2008:61-6) argues that religion is not an adaptation at all, but is a by-product relying on a set of other adaptations. The book provides lush ground for future research.

Religion has been one of the most important topics in anthropology going back to nineteenth century anthropologists who developed crude typological paradigms for the unfamiliar religious practices reported by explorers and colonial representatives. Such typologies fit neatly into these scholars “unilineal” and ethnocentric theories of societal development. The Evolutionary Anthropology Society is aware of the long history of abuse of evolutionary notions and ill-founded biological determinism in anthropology. Indeed, contemporary evolutionary theory can be a source of critiques of naïve and distorted analyses from anthropology and other disciplines.

Contributions to this column are welcome and may be sent to John Ziker (jziker@boisestate.edu). Columns are archived at www.evanthsoc.org.

General Anthropology Division

LUKE ERIC LASSITER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

GAD Committees and Interest Groups

The General Anthropology Division benefits from several committees and interest groups, all of which provide ways to engage our membership in the mission of GAD. This month, John “Mike” Coggeshall (Clemson U) offers a brief synopsis of GAD's Committee on Teaching Anthropology (CoTA).

Committee on Teaching Anthropology

By John “Mike” Coggeshall (CoTA Chair)

CoTA provides the General Anthropology Division, and thus anthropologists, with a forum in which to discuss one of the most critical functions of our profession—stimu-



lating, enriching and supporting minds by means of teaching the discipline we all share. To that end, CoTA provides three different means by which we can develop and enhance our teaching: teaching workshops, strategies in teaching and roundtable discussions.

Teaching workshops, led by senior or expert teachers typically every year at the AAA annual meeting, allow for the in-depth acquisition of skills and knowledge within a one-day (or less) framework. Usually limited by subscription, these workshops are open to all. Please watch this column for announcements, and participate if possible.

The session Strategies in Teaching, held biennially (next in 2009), offers teaching tips and strategies presented through papers to an audience, followed by a question and answer period. The best tips from past sessions have been collected by Pat Rice and David McCurdy and published as four volumes by Prentice Hall. A fifth volume is underway, so please think about paper ideas for future sessions and for publication. Watch this column for further announcements!

The roundtable discussions, held biennially in years alternating with the strategies session (and thus in 2008) provide a more relaxed, informal opportunity to discuss topics related to teaching. Each table focuses on a prearranged topic. Ideas and syllabi are shared over wine and cheese provided by the AAA, so please consider participating this fall. To volunteer to chair a table, please contact me as soon as possible (raucus@clemsun.edu).

While sometimes it seems as if newly-minted PhDs (or even battle-hardened seniors) overlook teaching and focus instead on cutting-edge research and graduate mentoring, CoTA would like to remind everyone about the critical importance of teaching, both intellectually and professionally. Teaching builds a foundation upon which may then be built solid research and theoretical creativity. Good teaching nurtures and stimulates creative minds. Remember that high school social studies teacher who allowed you to do your term paper on an odd (ie, anthropological) topic? Remember that first-semester anthropology course you were forced to take as a requirement, and remember how you realized how cool anthropology could be? Remember that intimidating senior professor who stopped you in the hall one day and said something even slightly encouraging about your work and how great that made you feel? Reflect on your own career, and how vital good teaching and mentoring have been to you. CoTA wants to help you nurture and support those skills, and pass them along to the next generation.

Whether you're a brand-new PhD wondering how to organize your first syllabus and develop "learning outcomes," or whether you're a grey-haired senior needing to learn how to better integrate technology into your classroom, CoTA can provide assistance. We would especially like to hear from members of the National Association of Student Anthropologists, Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges and

the Federation of Small Anthropology Programs, but all who teach in any capacity are welcome! By gathering with other teachers from a wide range of institutions, we can share strategies and struggles with like-minded colleagues.

Frequently, you may discover that problems or issues you face on your campus are in fact larger administrative concerns nationwide. For example, what are the benefits and drawbacks of undergraduate research seminars? What issues have faculty faced with study abroad programs or field schools (administratively, pedagogically and individually)? How will undergraduate learning outcomes be assessed or measured, especially as "learning portfolios" become more common? What strategies have been developed for better integrating anthropology courses into university general education requirements? How can social networking sites like "Facebook" be used to promote field schools, generate discussion, recruit graduate students or dispel misinformation? How can I get into the Facebook group called "Anthropology + good looks = a deadly combination?"

We in CoTA look forward to seeing you at future sessions, workshops and roundtables. Please contact me (raucus@clemsun.edu) if you would like to chair a roundtable at this fall's AAA meeting, and please join us in supporting the critical place of teaching and mentoring within the AAA.

2008 Forsythe Prize Call for Nominations

The Diana Forsythe Prize celebrates the best book or series of published articles in the spirit of Diana Forsythe's feminist anthropological research on work, science and technology, including biomedicine. For more information, please go to <http://stswiki.org/index.php/CASTAC>.

Please submit news, items of interest and ideas for future AN columns to Luke Eric Lassiter (lassiter@marshall.edu).

Middle East Section

EMILIO SPADOLA, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Recognizing Our Membership, 2007–08

May brings the academic year to a close, and with it comes a fine opportunity to acknowledge the collective and individual efforts and accomplishments of our section. We welcome our new members and thank all current members for their continued contributions and support. 2007–08 was remarkably productive. Our membership increased significantly to 366 members (as of December 2007) and our section remained financially sound, with assets of \$15,308.77. Several members of the Board of Directors finished very positive terms. Board President Bill Beeman is stepping down and we welcome new President-Elect Gregory Starrett of the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. Board Secretary Laurie King-Irani and Student Representative Emilio Spadola are stepping down, and other MES members

(soon to be introduced) will assume their posts. Additionally, several recent books by our members won accolades from within and beyond our geographic field and discipline.

The broad recognition of our members' work is especially notable, signaling both the high state of our scholarship and the contributions our members have made to anthropological theory and practice and Middle East studies. This year's AES Senior Book Prize was awarded to Lila Abu-Lughod for *Dramas of Nationhood: The Politics of Television in Egypt* (2005). AES Prize Committee Chair Carla Freeman praised the work's ethnographic foundation and theoretical breadth, noting:

This work is steeped within more than a decade of original fieldwork in Egypt and draws upon wide ranging theorizations of television media and its relationship to citizenship, national identity-formation, gender, Islam, the imagination and everyday life. *Dramas of Nationhood* focuses on the national identities at play in serial dramas and argues that these dramas and the conversations that emerge around them in urban and village life, production settings and in the press give us insight into how Egyptian citizens are thinking through Islam, the changing norms of gender, citizenship-claims across classes and regions of Egypt, and what are construed to be "proper life goals."

This year's AES Sharon Stephens First Book Award was awarded to co-winners Julia Elyachar, for *Markets of Dispossession: NGOs, Economic Development and the State in Cairo* (2005), and Charles Hirschkind, for *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (2006). Richard Handler of AES notes that Elyachar's book:

shows that empowering the poor to become micro-entrepreneurs more often than not has disadvantageous consequences for people who are not already well connected to political and economic capital. ... In its constant attention to the ways in which theory illuminates ethnography and ethnography prompts criticism of theory, [it] reaffirms the finest tradition of anthropological writing.

Rosemary Coombe of AES writes:

Through consideration of the embodied performance of listening as a technique of self-fashioning, [Hirschkind] illustrates how ethical subjects in Cairo assume a virtuous habitus that predisposes them to engage in new kinds of political practice. Elegantly written and beautifully structured, this volume ... challenges the constitution of anthropology's subdisciplines while providing a commentary on the limits of modern categories of thought for appreciating current configurations of power and knowledge.

Outside of the discipline of anthropology, the Middle East Studies Association awarded Jessica Winegar the prestigious Albert Hourani Book Award for *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (2006). Winegar's work examines the Egyptian cultural