

# Decolonial Feminisms and World Anthropologies

## Diverse Perspectives at the AAA Annual Meeting

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As noted by Bela Feldman-Bianco and Carla Guerrón Montero in the November/December *AN*, the AAA Committee on World Anthropologies (CWA) sponsored a number of productive sessions at its 2014 meeting in Washington DC. Among them was a panel that I co-organized with Andrew Canessa (Essex U) as an initiative of the CWA's subcommittee on Teaching and Research, and which emerged from a concern to bring together the insights of world anthropologies and decolonial feminisms. Broadly, we viewed this session as fitting squarely within the CWA mission to decolonize knowledge and challenge the current geopolitics of scholarly participation.

The panel questioned and challenged the ways in which the discipline values different forms and sites of knowledge production. The increasing attention to decentering the Euro-American production of anthropologies has given greater visibility and recognition to "anthropology otherwise." Within this current, a feminist strand has called for an epistemic shift in order to question the coloniality of power and, indeed, the coloniality of gender itself.

Participants from diverse world locations embraced various approaches to decolonial feminisms in the field of anthropology. The papers and discussion that followed considered ways to advance rethinking of such familiar and intertwined frames as gender, race and indigeneity at local and global levels. Inspiration was drawn from the decolonial theorizations of such scholars as Maria Lugones, Arturo Escobar, and Walter Dignolo, and from a small canon in decolonial feminist anthropology and related scholarship; among those influential are Zora Neale Hurston, Faye Harrison, Ruth Behar, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Chandra Mohanty, and Gayatri Spivak.

Central to our discussion was an examination of feminist interventions by scholar/activists who are calling for an epistemic shift that will enable "border thinking" by those wishing to promote dialogue that includes Afrodescendant, indigenous, and other populations that historically have been underrepresented in the field. To address both knowledge production through research and teaching practices, we examined collaborative research and teaching methodologies that contribute to broad decolonial and feminist projects.

### Session Highlights

Papers on the panel considered various research and teaching practices and their results, highlighting successful initiatives that have informed collaborations in feminist/world anthropologies. A common concern was to consider how we are all implicated in the project of decolonizing feminist anthropology (and anthro-

pology more generally), whatever our geographic and cultural positioning. Gender, race, sexuality and nationality condition our insertion in the discussion, but none of us can opt-out and all have a stake in working toward greater social inclusion in knowledge production in the discipline.

Hania Sholkamy (American U-Cairo) examined the rise and fall of gender rights in Egypt as evidence of the tension between state, women and civil society. In her analysis, she considered women's rights as proxies for modernity, as components of a hegemonic, state-sponsored discourse as well as avenues to a postcolonial civil society. Furthermore, she discussed the current implications of recent Egyptian history and its revolutionary ruptures for feminism and the state.

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Pamela Calla (New York U) suggested going beyond decoloniality to think in terms of "feminist constellations" of knowledge in the Americas. The notion of constellations allowed Calla to be more precise about the ways feminist tactics are deployed in wider struggles by different generations, classes, ethnicities and genders, at local, national and transnational levels. She showed how indigenous, black, border, and queer feminists are central to historical and contemporary challenges.

R Aída Hernández Castillo (CIESAS-México), a long-time contributor to the project of decolonizing feminist anthropology in the Latin American region, shared theoretical, methodological and political reflections developed with colleagues and activists in the

Decolonial Feminist Network. The feminist dialogical anthropology she proposed reflects upon a shared social reality and develops a research agenda for making knowledge relevant for social actors.

Meena Khandelwal (U Iowa) discussed how her teaching has been reshaped in light of feminist decolonial thought. Understanding coloniality/modernity as part of a singular historical process, she described the challenges of teaching introductory anthropology and South Asian studies. Based on her research on deforestation in India, she argued that decolonization requires not only critical attention to discourse but also to material and environmental impacts.

Carolyn Martin Shaw (UC Santa Cruz) detailed her feminist African-American "journey," based on her interconnections with a network of feminists from the United States, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Nigeria. She traced the wide-ranging influences of these feminists, including bell hooks and Audre Lorde, as well as Zimbabwean novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga, Nigerian literary scholar Obioma Nnaemeka, and Southern African journal editor Patricia MacFadden. She argued that interdisciplinary work can make the familiar strange and contribute to "anthropology otherwise."

Co-discussants Arturo Escobar (UNC Chapel Hill) and Diana Marcela Gomez Correal (UNC Chapel Hill) commended the panelists for their revisioning work in feminist and decolonial anthropology, and urged still further efforts to deepen the critical work that lies ahead. Escobar gave positive examples from feminist political ecology that are calling into question the fundamental problem

of how to "live on the earth" without assuming a common world. As Gómez Correal expressed it, the five papers provided "food for thought for deepening a field of knowledge-practice that has the potential to contribute to enact other political imaginaries and worlds." Both discussants emphasized that in the future we will need to press further in challenging anthropology's geopolitical limitations and masculinist orientation in order to reimagine the discipline as one that truly embraces feminist/world anthropologies.

*Bela Feldman-Bianco and Florence E Babb are contributing editors of World Anthropologies, the AN column of the AAA Committee on World Anthropologies.*