

Call for papers

« Anthropology and water(s) »

Special number of Journal des Anthropologues coordinated by Barbara Casciari (University Paris8) and Mauro Van Aken (University of Milan-Bicocca)

As the fundamental basis of life, water - more than other resources - is deeply embedded in social and cultural relations, an aspect that derives from its capacity to mediate between multiple aspects of social life: the relationship between man and nature, the environment, the pattern of territorial organization, institutions, power relations, cultural perceptions, value systems and dynamics of belonging. To study water, then, is to take into account the social, economic, political and cultural networks as well as the different types of relations and patterns of dependence, exclusion, solidarity or conflict that regulate the access to this common resource.

The powerful relational character of water, however, its crucial importance and strategic use in times of globalization, and its interdisciplinary and comparative vocation make it a privileged object of analysis in the production of anthropological knowledge. Notwithstanding a tradition of anthropological scholarship devoted to specific aspects of water management in other societies, generally as complement to ethnographic research, anthropology seems to have long undermined this object of research. Often, anthropological contribution to the study of water has delimited itself between two opposite extremes: on the one hand a « folkloristic » perspective, based on mythology, cosmology, belief systems, on the other an instrumental perspective of the discipline within applied water projects. Driven by folkloric interests or applied agendas, these studies have failed to recognize that water is embedded in social relations and have long ignored its “social life” within specific production systems, its practical and domestic uses in delocalized contexts, and the tensions between local environmental and value systems and our “modernization” of water. Otherwise, anthropology has long delegated the study of water to other disciplines (the natural and political sciences, geography, urban and development studies or ancient history).

This issue of *Journal des Anthropologues* is devoted to the multiple relations that lie behind and originate from water, here intended as a crucial relational medium. By placing water at the core of ethnographic practice and investigation, anthropology – and more in general the social sciences – are called upon a reflection on wider social dynamics and broad theoretical debates.

The overall goal of this issue is to study water as “subject” (of agency, of history, of change), a perspective that allows to overcome the nature/culture dichotomy, where society stands as the pole of agency and management and water is represented as a passive object to be managed. By distancing from the prejudices of the modern paradigm and its examination of water as a passively mute object, a simple resource or commodity signified and managed by society, water will here be taken into account and considered as a driving force of human relations, a means of creative action, and the site of social, cultural and political confrontation.

The anthropologists that focus here their fieldwork departing from water and from the relations that water establishes in the complex dynamics of the contemporary world are solicited to join a common debate on some main issues of water/society relationship. Water is more and more at the centre of political agendas, of new patterns of capitalism and new patterns of appropriation of nature, due to its “scarcity”, the privatisation and commoditisation process, the environmental, agrarian and hydraulic crisis, the collapse or wide deconstruction of cooperative systems, global

interest of multinational and *hydrocracies*: several aspects that make of “local waters” a global affaire and that are relegating local systems of water use to the margins, to destruction or in conflict relations within the encounter with exogenous practices and models. Aside from its apparent « naturalness », important dynamics are hidden in water management, dynamics that anthropological analysis of local contexts can highlight, starting from the radical translation of water into H₂O within modernization process.

Contributors are expected to participate in the ongoing debate about the relationship between water and societies and provide anthropological analyses of local contexts. This special number of the *Journal des Anthropologues* will combine works from different regional contexts (Asian, African, American and European), from various perspectives and will consider the anthropological study of water and its relation with other disciplines. We call for contribution of the following topics (the list is not exhaustive): centralization/decentralization, hierarchy/autonomy, scarcity and competition, modernisations and local knowledge, commodification, liberalization and changing commons, development intervention and the legitimacy discourses of the modernist paradigm, H₂O and other socio-cultural models of water use.

Calendar and timings of papers

The number is planned for publication in the first semester of 2013. Authors may send a title of their paper with an abstract (maximum 5000 characters) and five key words before the **30th March 2012**. Selected contributors will have to send the completed papers of maximum 40.000 characters before the **30th June 2012**.

The articles will have to:

- present original and recent ethnographic material
- focus explicitly on one or more than one thematic issues proposed in the call for contributions
- establish an explicit relation between their ethnographic material and the methodological and theoretical reflections suggested the call for papers

The mails have to be sent to both coordinators of this thematic issue:

Barbara Casciarri : barbara.casciarri@gmail.com

Mauro van Aken : mauro.vanaken@unimib.it

Norms for texts and the modalities of editorial organization of the Revue will be consulted at the following addresses:

<http://www.afa.msh-paris.fr>

<http://www.jda.revues.org>

Beside the papers for this issue, contributors can send also contribution for the different rubrics related to water (« Recherches et débats », « Anthropologies actuelles », « Echos d’ici et d’ailleurs », « Anthropologie visuelle »). The deadlines and the mail addresses of the number coordinators can be consulted on the same web site.