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Announcements

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By Morgan Philbin

[Call for Papers](#)

Symposium 'Beyond Biosocialities in Medical Anthropology' Organizers: Eileen Moyer and Vinh-Kim Nguyen

Amsterdam, 17-19 January 2013

The field of medical anthropology has enjoyed explosive growth since its emergence roughly forty years ago, driven both by tremendous interest in the innovative ways in which it has addressed understanding human relations, the increasing importance of biomedicine in everyday lives and in framing and understanding basic human problems, and the rise of global health as a field of practice. In retrospect we can see how twenty years ago the field, largely dominated by cross-cultural studies of health, illness, medical systems and medicalization, began to shift to concerns with the making and remaking of socialities and indeed life itself. A symptom of this shift was the turn from the critical framework of medicalization to that of biosociality.

In 1992, Paul Rabinow, an anthropologist conducting research on the social implications of the Human Genome Project, first used the term biosocialities to draw attention to the a wide range of emergent socialities produced in the context and as a result of genetic research. Rabinow rightly predicted that the mapping of the human genome would lead to a remaking of social life, as people began identifying and socializing as genetic beings; but it was not just the social that would change. At stake was the very definition of life itself. As Gibbons and Novas summarized: "What was significant about this project, from the perspective of the social sciences, was that the potential to know, remake and to create new life forms brought into question long established ideas about what counts as natural" (2008:3). In other words, genetic research would challenge the boundary of nature and culture in a way that would have profound effects on society and social life, the very subjects of social scientific research, including medical anthropology.

At the time, it seemed the social sciences were waiting for such a concept to help frame research situated at the interstices of science and nature. In

the twenty intervening years since the concept was introduced, a plethora of studies have taken it up and applied it to examine and theorize the way genetic research has transformed the way humans think about life, nature and culture. Others have realized the usefulness of the term for framing research beyond the field of genetics, examining the way other sciences including biological, medical, and public health, have also contributed to the remaking of culture and society through a wide range of theories about what it means to be human, and tools and techniques to facilitate the remaking of identity and sociality.

This symposium seeks to capture what we see as a pivotal moment in medical anthropology, which is confronted head-on with numerous challenges. Today, as economic crises and demographic changes challenge health systems world-wide, discoveries in epigenomics and epidemiology challenge biology as a universal basis for understanding health and illness, fraying the epistemological fabric of biomedicine. Meanwhile global health efforts threaten to be overwhelmed by changes in environment, agriculture and diet. To launch the conversation on future directions in medical anthropology, during this three-day symposium, we propose to revisit Rabinow's concept, to take stock of where we are now—twenty years on—in the field of medical anthropology, and ask how we might move beyond a biosociality paradigm to address critical issues at the boundaries of nature, society, health and medicine today. We invite short, theoretical contributions (concept papers or 'think pieces') along, but not limited to, the following themes:

- Genes, race and health
- The environment, food and well-being
- Reproductive technologies, life and the practice of science
- The biopolitics of global health

Our symposium will be organised as a workshop. Sessions will be organised to discuss and explore issues raised by the concept papers, which will themselves not be presented as it is expected that participants will have read them beforehand. The goal is to identify a broad theoretical and research agenda. At the workshop we will agree to a publication format for the revised contributions for the journal *Medische Antropologie* (<http://tma.socsci.uva.nl/>), which will be relaunched under a new name in June 2012.

Those interested in participating in the symposium should register through the website: <http://www.medical-anthropology.nl/>. Those who want to present a 'think piece' should submit a title and 250 words abstract by 30

September 2012 through the same website. In your abstract, please indicate the panel you would like to join. Full-length papers (5,000 words max) are due 1 January.

Registration before 1 January 2013. Registration fee 50 euro to be paid at the symposium.

The exact form of the symposium will be announced later. For the time being, use Eileen Moyer's email for all communication (e.m.moyer@uva.nl) with cc to Sjaak van der Geest (s.vandergeest@uva.nl).

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