Travel Grants
Just a quick reminder that AFA also awards several travel grants to under-represented women in order for them to attend the annual meetings. Please refer to our website, www.gal.berkeley.edu/~afaweb, for further information on next year's travel grant competition. This year's travel grant awards will be announced at the annual meetings in San Francisco.

Who We Are:
Due to the number of changes the AFA has undergone during the past year, we will update our officers list this month and next month as our new Board Members are formally announced:

Chair: Sandra Morgen (U Oregon)
Chair-Elect: A Lynn Rolles (U Maryland, College Park)
Treasurer: Geraldine Moreno-Black (U Oregon)
Secretary: Christine G T Ho (U South Florida)
Program Co-Chairs: Maritza Straughn-Williams (Colby) and Mary K Anglin (U Kentucky)
Voices Co-Editors: France Winddance Twine (U North Carolina) and Evelyn Blackwood (Purdue)
Executive Board: Irma McClurin (U Florida), Nandini Gunawardena (Pomona C), Jennie R Joe (U Arizona), Ann Kingsolver (U South Carolina) and Carol Mukhopadhyay (San Jose State)
Web Designer: Kathleen Sterling (UC Berkeley)

My Changes
I recently moved to New Hampshire to cut down on the drive into the college from Massachusetts, and have had a stretch of bad luck with internet providers, computers self-destructing, and address changes getting lost somewhere in a great postal black hole. For this I apologize. Hopefully, with new computer happily buzzing on my desk, a new internet provider, and my address changes finally going through, things will get back to normal. I will list both my home and college email with every column, as well as my department address and office telephone in hopes of avoiding any further communications blackouts.

Please submit news items, articles, and brief field reports to Kelli Ann Costa at: Dept of Anthropology, Crestview Hall 334, Franklin Pierce C, Rindge, NH 03461; tel 603/899-4207; fax, 603/899-4324, costake@fpc.edu or costaka@earthlink.net. Visit the AFA website at www.gal.berkeley.edu/~afaweb.

Association for Political and Legal Anthropology

John R Bowen, Contributing Editor

This month, Annelise Riles offers reflections on legal theory from an anthropological perspective.

Thanks, Annelise, and may others of you follow suit!

An Ethnography of Abstractions? By Annelise Riles (Northwestern U, American Bar Foundation)

As a law professor well-situated for participant-observation in one realm of American legal rhetoric and practice, I have been struggling lately to come to terms with an intriguing ethnographic fact: the current renaissance of the style of rhetoric and accompanying epistemology known as formalism. Formalism dominated the legal academy over a century ago but fell out of explicit favor after the advent of legal modernism and the influx of insights and critiques from anthropolo-
gy and related disciplines into the legal academy in the 1920s. Formalists favor statute-based governance (as opposed to case-by-case, judge-made law) and reasoning through systems of rules and exceptions (as opposed to establishing broad "standards" sensitive to changing social conditions). The institutional and theoretical trappings associated most directly with formalism have always co-existed with anti-formalist critiques. What is new is that formalism, as an epistemological orientation as well as a political aspiration, is once again enjoying widespread attention and debate. Indica of the formalist revival range from the organization of a major conference on the subject at the U of Chicago last year, to the char-
acter of "reform" in the regulatory institutions of the global economy that I study. It is now generally acknowledged that the "deregulation" of the global economy has been followed by a "re-regula-
tion" that is far more rule-dependent than the old domestic regulatory regimes.

The New Formalists assert that legal texts have a singular, transparent, stable, cross-cultural meaning independent of the identity of the inter-
preter or the text's social, political or historical context. Hence their faith in what Justice Antonin Scalia has called "the rule of law as a law of rules." This explicit repudiation of understand-
ings of the multiplicity of possible perspectives on or meanings of a singular text in turn supports a political argument. Formalists assert that judges in a democratic society should be constrained to "applying" the law as written by the legislative and should not be permitted to "make" it through novel interpretations. In the US, formalists tend to favor more politically conservative socia-
list policies. They point to judicial decisions on topics such as abortion and affirmative action as examples of departures from the "plain mean-
ing" of legal texts to support political causes lacking the support of the legislature or its electorate.

Interestingly enough, in Japan, where I have been conducting fieldwork among legal scholars, bankers and regulators, the formalist repudiation of social and cultural context has also found an avid audience among those eager to demonstrate that differences between American and Japanese institutions are not due to "cultural differences." In Japan, however, formalism is associated more with an epistemological position than a political one. Its appeal does not stem from an effort to curb anti-democratic progressivism. To come to terms with this phenomenon as an ethnographer is daunting. For starters, legal anthropologists have always had a greater interest in "law in action" (in institutions, in infor-
mal and non-Western dispute resolution processes) than in "law on the books." Indeed, legal anthropology, along with the broader "law and society" movement, has served more as a foot soldier for the anti-formalist position than as an observer. It has demonstrated, with pow-
erful examples from diverse social contexts, that rules are not objective, context-free phenomena, that relationships, informal dispute resolution procedures, and community justice are as important as doctrine, and that "process" is as important as "rules". Yet this position will not help me navigate my way through my field site. As a sheer matter of institutional survival, I have had to develop some tools for coming to terms with my informants' attraction to form, as irra-
tional and troubling as we may take it to be. If, as we assert, the "certainty" of legal formalism is a veneer, we might be interested in the features of this veneer, how it garners the commitment of scholars and practitioners, and what uses its adherents may find for it.

As anthropologists, we might be particularly interested in formalism's universalizing claims. To resist a belief in formalism is to explicitly repudiate a "culturalist" view that the self and its desires are constructed rather than in text. "The Rule of Law is one and the same, in America and in Sri Lanka," the formalists assert, and a respect for the dignity of persons everywhere demands a belief that as rational actors they would respond to the logic of legal rules in only one way. By now you may be asking, "Could anyone really believe this?" Perhaps we might respond by following anthropologists of religion in their turn from belief to ritual practice. Yet there is a prob-
lem with treating the practices of legal academics and practitioners as yet another set of rituals to be studied in traditional anthropological terms. This is the problem of how to study abstractions: phe-
nomena that deny their own concreteness and hence their own specificity, and in so doing subvert our best comparative devices. Let me explain just a little more with reference to formalism's universalizing ethics.

Let me begin with the question of how could anyone believe in the idea of a singularity and universality of meaning. My own preliminary work on the performative dimensions of formal-
ism suggests that its "ideas" —the logic and epistemology at its heart—may not be all that impor-
tant to its enactment. What is important for the current formalist renaissance is that, as a genre of rhetoric and analysis, formalism has become more pleasurable, fascinating, and interesting. In classrooms and faculty seminars, formalist argu-
ments increasingly are taken to "make sense." In casual conversation, moreover, legal scholars and practitioners alike confess to the "appeal" of these arguments. Indeed, although the lega

SECTION NEWS
Biology includes both avid formalists and avid anti-formalists, in their sense of their adherence to different ideologies. Most everyone is a formalist in their appreciation of a good performance in the formalist genre. They admire skill in enacting and responding to the possibilities of legal formalism. For them, this is what "thinking like a lawyer" means. Hence it is no surprise that, after almost a century of careful critique, formalism still stands.

Consider how different the task of the legal scholar is from his or her academic colleagues. For the academic, textually mediated analysis engenders the social relations that are integral to professional success. A work's audience is the community of readers who might be enticed to join the author in a debate. Yet for the legal formalist, the relevant site of relationality is not the text but the classroom. The prototype of the evidence of the academic person is the classroom performance. It serves as model for the various other genres of formal and informal conversations among peers. In each case, the evidence of academic sociality is the memory conversation the performance elicits. Where the ideal academic debate engages a group of a particular size—not too large and not too small—the formalist "debate" potentially encapsulates anyone who witnesses the performance: teachers, students, practitioners, colleagues, patrons, or strangers with whom one happens to be sharing lunch. The achievement of such momentary relationality is dependent on the performer's ability to generate interest at that moment by framing a question or set of materials in a sufficiently focused and yet general way, such that a contentious conversation can be generated in a matter of minutes among the members of the audience. No matter how successful the performance and lively the conversation, however, no one expects that the conversation will be sustained beyond the event. It is the performance, not the particulars of the community it might generate, that is of greatest concern. In its universality, then, the New Formalism only makes explicit what is already in principle. Indeed, they are children of our sociological insights. They embrace them, acknowledge them, and then assert, as a matter of faith, the power of formalism and hence deploy our relativizing tools against us to deny us their universality.

The problem, then, is that these faithful assertions on behalf of the universal rule of law, like the other performances of the formalist class...

Send your contributions to John R. Bowen, Anthropology Dept., Box 1114, Washington U at St. Louis, St. Louis, MO 63130-4899; tel 314/935-5680, fax 314/935-8335, johnbowen@artsci.wustl.edu.

**Biological Anthropology Section**

D. Andrew Meredith, Contributing Editor

AAPPs: The AAP meetings in San Antonio were fun. What a fantastic place to hold a conference! The Riverwalk was wonderful and provided a great place to relax and talk about the day's papers and research. Lots of exciting new non-human primate genetics, evolution and behavior papers, slides, and posters this year. One interesting approach was to measure testosterone and cortisol in the feces of primates to evaluate their effects on behavior. As always, the posters were great; they provided an opportunity for the presenters to interact with their audiences. Slide session never seem to work as well; there is not enough time to ask questions after each slide presentation.

Kudos to the Southwest Foundation staff and the local arrangements committee for doing such a fine job of running the meetings. The staff included: Sarah Williams-Blangero (chair), Laura Almasy, John Blangero, Claudia Brambilla, Linda Prent, Tony Cornuz, Karen Chambers, Michael Mahaney, Lisa Martin, Tim Newman, Karl North, Jeff Rogers, Ted Schurr and Jeff Williams. I didn't really feel like I was in Texas until we ate at a Texas Rib restaurant on the Riverwalk and was served a rack of ribs that could easily have been mistaken for a rack of dinosaur ribs from the Flintstones cartoon.

**Bio News**

Lots of exciting items and rumors in the news lately. Two papers (one by Hagelebel et al in Phil...