

IS NATIVE ANTHROPOLOGY REALLY POSSIBLE?

The research trajectory of a number of anthropologists has followed a familiar path that begins in a foreign country and eventually 'comes home' (see e.g. Behar 1996; Motzafi-Haller 1997; Rosaldo 1989). Quite often, our first dissertation field research projects involve studying peoples in remote, foreign locations as a rite of passage that validates us as a *bona fide* anthropologist. Then, for personal or academic reasons (or out of sheer convenience), we eventually conduct research at home, often among our own people or ethnic group.

Coming home?

I began my anthropological career as a Japan specialist and conducted fieldwork among Japanese Brazilians who have 'return' migrated from Brazil to Japan as unskilled immigrants working in Japanese factories (see Tsuda 2003). My dissertation project also included extensive fieldwork among Japanese Brazilians in Brazil. During this research, I became interested in a future project comparing Japanese Brazilians in Brazil with Japanese Americans in the United States as part of the 'diaspora' of Japanese descendants scattered throughout the Americas.

It was a logical extension of my dissertation research and a great opportunity to compare two ethnic minorities of the same ancestral origin who have been living for many generations in countries with different race relations and histories. In addition, being a second generation Japanese American myself, I figured there would be obvious advantages to studying my own people. After being sidetracked for quite some time with other projects, I have finally been able to focus my research on Japanese Americans in recent years.

Therefore, like others before me, I have experienced an ethnographic homecoming of sorts and have become a so-called 'native anthropologist'. However, does native anthropology really feel like coming home?

Initially, I did not think that fieldwork with my own ethnic group in my own country would be that interesting when compared with my previous dissertation research. For me, Japanese Brazilians had been an exotic 'other' from a foreign, Latin American country. Even though they were also Japanese descendants, they spoke Portuguese and inhabited a different, Brazilian culture. In addition, they had migrated to Japan only to find that they had become culturally and socioeconomically marginalized, strangers in their ethnic homeland, which resulted in all sorts of novel and remarkable experiences.

Every interview and participant observation had the potential to uncover something new and fascinating. In contrast, not only were Japanese Americans familiar to me, they are well educated middle class Americans, no longer suffer from serious discrimination, and generally do not migrate. As a result, they

were not 'exotic' and seemed rather ordinary to me. I kept telling myself that only the comparative dimension of this project would be interesting.

However, as I began my fieldwork, I was immediately drawn to, and eventually fascinated by the experiences of Japanese Americans. They were not as familiar or ordinary as I initially expected! Although I had been acquainted with Japanese Americans my entire life, they somehow remained an anthropological 'other' for me. In fact, I eventually found Japanese Americans to be so interesting that I decided they should be analyzed in their own right. I quickly decided to first write an independent book about them, before I eventually moved on to my comparative magnum opus about the 'Japanese diaspora'.

Questioning native anthropology

In contrast to previous images of white (usually male) anthropologists studying the 'natives' (usually darker peoples) in faraway lands, there has been considerable discussion about the apparent rise of 'native anthropologists' in the last few decades. It has been repeatedly mentioned that in contrast to 'non-native' anthropologists, our immediate cultural and linguistic familiarity with the people we are studying will provide us with superior access, rapport, and empathy, ultimately leading to more emic, sensitive, and authentic ethnographic portrayals that are less subject to Westernized, colonizing, and objectifying perspectives (Anae 2010: 230-232; Hayano 1979: 101-102; Kanuha 2000: 441-443; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Wang 2002: 166; see also Aguilar 1981 and Narayan 1993: 676-677, for summaries of such claims).

Because native anthropologists are members of the groups they study, their ethnographies are also described as more politically engaged and activist-oriented, uncovering social inequities, as well as systems of power and domination (Abu-Lughod 1991: 142-143; Anae 2010: 227-228; Hayano 1979: 101-102; Motzafi-Haller 1997: 215-217).¹ Nonetheless, native anthropologists may take certain observations for granted as insiders and apparently have more difficulty maintaining 'objective' detachment from the peoples they study (Hayano 1979: 101-102; Kanuha 2000: 441-443; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984).

In addition, a number of native anthropologists have been concerned about how non-native, Western anthropologists have dominated scholarly representations and discourses about their own cultures, relegating natives to the mere status of informants or useful tools for gathering information (Kuwayama 2003; Medicine 2001: 5; Smith 2012). They have noted how the natives themselves have been highly critical of the ethnographies written about them by outsider anthropologists, which do not dialogue with them but address aca-



Fig. 1. An 1861 image expressing the Jōi ('Expel the barbarians') sentiment.

demic audiences (Kuwayama 2003: 10). Such ethnographies are therefore seen by certain native scholars and intellectuals as unreliable, irrelevant, and disparaging and can even reinforce Eurocentric academic and institutional power structures (Kuwayama 2003: 11-12; Medicine 2001; Smith 2012: 3; Trask 1999).

As a result, some wish to do work that is more meaningful and has a positive impact on the lives of indigenous peoples (Medicine 2001: 14; Smith 2012: 9). Native anthropologists are now challenging the past hegemony of Euro-American anthropologists and are struggling for recognition, sometimes producing a cultural power struggle between insider and outsider (see Kuwayama 2003: 12-13; Trask 1999).

Although such concerns certainly have validity, they essentialize the difference between native and non-native anthropologists based on the simple dichotomy of insider versus outsider. Because native anthropologists are insiders who apparently share the cultures and concerns of those they study, it is assumed they will have a fundamentally different and more culturally sensitive and locally relevant ethnographic perspective in contrast to the inherently problematic representations of non-native, outsider anthropologists.

In addition, such simple dichotomies ignore the increasing number of 'semi-native' anthropologists, such as US-born Japanese American anthropologists studying Japan (Tsuda 2003: 1-51; Kondo 1986) or an American anthropologist of half Indian descent studying India (Narayan 1993). Their complex and constantly shifting positionality in the field cannot be characterized by a straightforward insider versus outsider perspective.

I suggest that we question this simple dichotomy of native versus non-native anthropologist. Even insider anthropologists will still encounter educational, social class, gender, generational, urban/rural, or cultural differences with the peoples they study because all social groups (even the most homogeneous) are fragmented by internal differences (Aguilar 1981: 25; Jacobs-Huey 2002: 793-796; Medicine 2001: 5-6; Kuwayama 2003: 9; Motzafi-Haller 1997: 217-219; Narayan 1993: 671, 675; Nelson 1996). As a result, there are plenty of examples of native anthropologists who are seen as outsiders and have difficulty being accepted by their own communities, or conversely, become embroiled in internal conflicts (Aguilar 1981: 21; Hayano 1979: 100; Jacobs-Huey 2002: 796-797; Messerschmidt 1981: 8; Tsuda 2003: 32-33).

Therefore, even for those of us who study our own ethnic group, the distance between the anthropologist and the 'natives' remains. Just like non-native anthropologists, we must also constantly negotiate our positionality in the field as we move along a scale of relative distance from those we study, or what Linda Williamson Nelson (1996) refers to as 'gradations of endogeneity'. All anthropologists are both partial outsiders and partial insiders who experience various degrees of acceptance and cultural insight. Therefore, native anthropologists do not necessarily enjoy a privileged status compared to those who are non-natives, nor can they really claim that their ethnographic writings have greater cultural authenticity, insight, and relevance (Hayano 1979: 102; Jacobs-Huey 2002: 793; Motzafi-Haller 1997: 217-219; Reed-Danahay 1997: 3-4; Wang 2002).

This simply indicates how anthropological knowledge is inherently partial and never complete because it is always contextually situated, i.e. dependent on how we are socially positioned in relation to our research participants, which continuously shifts in productive or less productive ways.

The distinction between native and non-native anthropologists is therefore not absolute, but a relative continuum, with the former simply more likely to be culturally and socially closer to their research participants. Indeed, regardless of what type of anthropologist we are (native, non-native, semi-native), the distance and differences between researcher and researched always persist and can never be completely eliminated.

Nonetheless, I argue that such cultural differences are not detrimental, but productive for fieldwork. And this is not simply because it allows us to maintain 'objective' detachment or because it enables us to think about our positionality in the field and how it facilitates or restricts access to ethnographic information. Ultimately, as I will discuss below, difference is essential to the generation of anthropological knowledge.

How 'native' are we? Entering the field

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, I am a second generation Japanese American (*nisei*). However, I am what Japanese



Fig. 2. Takeyuki Tsuda in the field (left): Mochitsuki (pounding rice to make rice cakes) at the Buddhist Temple of San Diego.

Americans call a *shin-nisei* (the 'new second generation'), who are the descendants of Japanese who immigrated to the United States mainly after World War II. *Shin-nisei* therefore have experiences that are quite different from pre-war second generation *nisei*, whose Japanese parents came to the United States before 1924. They were interned in concentration camps during World War II and their descendants are either third generation *sansei* or fourth generation *yonsei*.

My father immigrated to the United States in the 1960s as a biochemistry graduate student at the University of Chicago. I grew up partly in the Japanese expatriate business community in Chicago where I attended Japanese Saturday school from fourth grade to the end of high school, primarily with children from Japan, although there were a few US-born *shin-nisei* like myself in my classes. Our parents also forced my brother and me to speak only Japanese at home and took us to Japan a number of times. As a result, like other *shin-nisei*, I became bilingual, bicultural, and transnational.

I never identified as 'Japanese American' or even as a second generation '*nisei*' when I was growing up. Neither my parents nor my Japanese classmates in Saturday school ever referred to me in such a manner. Instead, I saw myself as a 'Japanese' (*nihonjin*), who just happened to be born and raised in the United States. I have felt much more connected to Japan throughout my entire life than to the experiences and history of Japanese Americans in the United States. In fact, even to this day, other Americans often mistake me for a Japanese from Japan (perhaps the '1.5 generation', arriving in the US before adolescence). This is probably because my English continues to have a Japanese inflection, my demeanor may sometimes appear to be 'Japanese', and I have a very distinctive, Japanese first name (in contrast to most Japanese Americans who have American first names).

Growing up in Chicago, I always regarded 'Japanese Americans' as people who were descendants of Japanese who immigrated before World War II and were therefore quite different from our family. They were completely Americanized, had lost their con-

nections to Japan, had a different history that included internment during World War II, and lived on the other side of the city. In fact, my mother had strong prejudices about Japanese Americans. She regarded them as descendants of low-class, uneducated, and poor rural Japanese who could not survive economically in pre-war Japan and had no choice but to abandon their homeland for America.

Although I did become acquainted with a number of Japanese Americans growing up, virtually all of them were other *shin-nisei* with similar bilingual and transnational Japanese backgrounds like myself. Of course, I did not think of them as '*shin-nisei*' or even 'Japanese American' back then. Like me, they were American-born 'Japanese'. In fact, it was probably not until graduate school that I started to actively refer to myself as 'Japanese American' in the ethnically diverse environment at the University of California at Berkeley.

When I went home to Chicago and called myself 'Japanese American' in front of my mother, she was quite upset and tried very hard to convince me to stop using the term! However, I adamantly refused, having finally found the most appropriate ethnic label for myself. In the past, I had used 'Japanese', which technically meant someone from Japan; 'Asian', which lacked ethnic specificity; and 'Oriental', which had been a childhood term that had long since become politically incorrect.

Given my personal background, when I first started my research on Japanese Americans, I felt like a cultural outsider. Although I was technically studying my own ethnic group, I was familiar with only the *shin-nisei*, a small sub-population that was detached from the broader Japanese American community and were not a product of the internment experience during World War II. As a result, I had never felt like an 'authentic' Japanese American. Therefore, the cultural differences I experienced with most Japanese Americans were not necessarily based on educational level, professional status, social class background, or even gender, but generation.²

In fact, I still remember meeting my first Japanese American contact in San Diego, an elderly third generation *sansei* woman who

ended up becoming one of my best informants and a good friend. After we got acquainted, the first question she asked me was: 'Are you from Japan?' Great, I thought. Even the Japanese Americans think I am 'Japanese' and cannot tell that I am actually a fellow Japanese American!

As I began actively attending local Japanese American community events in San Diego, I initially felt like an intruder who did not belong, although I was always openly welcomed when I met people. I had never had any contact or interest in the broader Japanese American community while growing up and was completely unfamiliar with their cultural activities, although some of them certainly resembled festivities I had seen in Japan. Almost everyone I encountered was either a pre-war *nisei* or third generation *sansei* and they were quite different from the *shin-nisei* Japanese Americans that I had known my entire life. In fact, none of the dozens of people I met through Japanese American community organizations were *shin-nisei*, as far as I could tell.

Because of my strong Japanese cultural background and lingering accent, I always felt that the people I met would wonder whether I was a real Japanese American. I was struck (actually a bit distraught) when I noticed that a few elderly Japanese American women actually *bowed* when I spoke with them! Since a Japanese American would never bow to another Japanese American, I assumed this indicated they thought that I was a Japanese foreigner from Japan. Bowing was of course a polite gesture, but for me, it meant, 'we don't think you are one of us'.

Apparently, the cultural and generational differences were palpable on both sides. On those occasions when Japanese Americans seemed confused about my ethnicity, I would actually say, 'I'm also a Japanese American'. In fact, I felt like adding, '*shin-nisei* are Japanese Americans too, you know?' Of course, once I identified myself as Japanese American, no one contested my ethnic claims, especially when I told them I was actually *shin-nisei*. Once it became clear to them that I was born in the United States, I felt accepted as a fellow Japanese American, even if I had initially appeared to them to be a Japanese from Japan. Therefore, shared nationality became a critical factor that helped overcome cultural and generational differences.

As my fieldwork progressed, I became acquainted with many Japanese Americans and eventually became a familiar face in the local San Diego Japanese American community. In fact, when I would show up to community events, a number of people would be familiar with me and would come up to greet me. It was evident that because I am technically Japanese American, I was able to blend into the ethnic community much more than a white person. My ethnicity also probably made Japanese Americans more willing to meet for an interview and talk freely about their experiences. I was even asked to deliver a keynote speech at the annual meeting of the Japanese American Historical Society of San Diego about my research. There were hundreds of

attentive Japanese Americans in the audience and the talk was well received.

Despite my progressive immersion in the field, the cultural differences between me and my research participants were never erased, as is the case with all anthropologists. The generational differences between myself and most other Japanese Americans continued to persist. It was only when I was interviewing other *shin-nisei* and sharing our similar experiences that I felt I was truly with my 'own people'. Yet, it was generational differences that made Japanese Americans so inherently fascinating to me, not 'ordinary' as I had initially expected.

'Othering' in fieldwork

I argue that difference is productive and essential for fieldwork. In addition to preventing boredom for 'native anthropologists', I suggest that difference is also 'good to think with' for both anthropologist and research participant alike in the mutual creation of social knowledge. In contrast to those who have claimed that the insider similarities of 'native anthropologists' endow them with privileged, emic insight, I actually found that it was the generational differences of most Japanese Americans that led to ethnographic and even theoretical insight. This was especially true with pre-war *nisei*. Although we were both second generation offspring of Japanese immigrants, I constantly felt that our cultural, ethnic, and historical consciousness was very different, causing me to realize how different historical experiences can produce considerable variation within the same immigrant generation.

Difference was actually productive for my interviewees as well. During our conversations, I would often talk about my own experiences as a Japanese American, allowing my interviewees to use me as a sounding board to reflect on how their ethnic background was different. Many of these were generational differences. Some of the elderly pre-war *nisei* reflected upon how their internment experience as 'enemy aliens' during World War II had caused them to become Americanized (in order to demonstrate their national loyalties) compared to postwar *shin-nisei* like myself who were more bicultural and transnational. Older *sansei* interviewees spoke about how their loss of heritage, culture and language, was due to their greater generational distance from their immigrant grandparents as well as their not being raised in the contemporary, multicultural environment, in contrast to myself. The *sansei*, as well as fourth generation *yonsei* youth, sometimes remarked how great it was that I spoke Japanese fluently and had maintained my cultural background – something they were not able to do.

In fact, even my knowledge of the *shin-nisei* was not absolute, and there were subtle differences in our backgrounds. For instance, most of them were college students and considerably younger than me, producing differences based on age. One *shin-nisei* spent part of his youth in Mexico, creating some differences in ethnic consciousness.

Therefore, 'othering' is essential for fieldwork regardless of all the existential and post-

modernist angst the term now evokes among some anthropologists. Indeed, cultural difference has been the intellectual justification and cornerstone on which anthropology has been built. One of the hallmarks of our discipline has always been to bring the detailed, emic experiences of different (and yes, exotic) others to our audiences in a sympathetic, readable (and also unreadable) manner. No one wants to peruse a fieldwork-based account of a remote tribe living in the African bush only to hear that they are 'just like us'.

But more importantly, cultural difference is the foundation of knowledge for both 'native' and 'non-native' anthropologists alike. If our fieldwork and research simply elicits information about people with whom we are already completely familiar, it is not new knowledge, but simply confirmation of what we already know. If most Japanese Americans had in fact been very similar or even identical to me, or if I had only studied the *shin-nisei*, I would not have learned as much that was new about them. Therefore, I acquired the greatest amount of new anthropological knowledge from Japanese Americans who were from other generations. In contrast to the standard postmodernist position that the epistemological status of the 'other' makes them ultimately unknowable, I argue that it is precisely this 'otherness' that makes them the subject of anthropological knowledge. Even with the *shin-nisei*, there were gender, age, and regional differences³ that made them anthropologically interesting to me.

Apparently, some anthropologists have recently become wary of our discipline's constant emphasis on cultural difference. For instance, Matti Bunzl (2004) argues that we need to move beyond the dichotomy of self/other in ethnographic fieldwork. As I and other anthropologists (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1991) have argued, this is not possible nor desirable, even for those of us who study our own ethnic group. Therefore, Bunzl advocates a return to a Boasian anthropology based on Foucaultian historical genealogies that ground contemporary differences in the past.

I agree that we must be cognizant of how the peoples we study, and their differences, are historically constituted. However, if we are to avoid the contemporary 'othering' of the peoples we study in fieldwork, we threaten to undermine one of the most fundamental aspects of anthropological knowledge. While we need to be constantly wary about essentializing and exoticizing the cultural differences we encounter in the field, we should not hope to escape them. ●

Takeyuki (Gaku) Tsuda
takeyuki.tsuda@asu.edu,
Arizona State University

Takeyuki Tsuda received his doctorate in anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley and is currently Professor of Anthropology at the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University.

1. It must be remembered, however, that not all 'natives' are marginalized and oppressed, indicating the problematic connotations that the term has in anthropology (see also Appadurai 1988).

2. Not only are Japanese Americans in general highly educated and middle class, they completely understood the

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THE RETURN OF *HOMO OEOECONOMICUS* TO ANTHROPOLOGY

Comment on economic deviance by
James G. Carrier (AT 6[6]: 1-2)

When the editor of *A handbook of economic anthropology* addresses economic deviance, *Homo oeconomicus* seems to have safely found his place in anthropology. The new attribute of being deviant cannot mask the model: it is the egoistically and materially oriented individual of economic theory that has, once more, slinked into anthropology. Carrier's text provokes comments with theoretical and practical implications. It is not a '[f]arewell to *Homo economicus*' as Hann and Hart (2012: 172-174) have argued, it is rather his return that is observed. The latter has the potential to encourage fruitful cross-disciplinary discourse. I point out three aspects as comments to Carrier with reference to the insights from microeconomic theories.

Firstly, Carrier defines deviance as activities which are perceived by other individuals as 'deceptive and wrong' with respect to given social standards. His description of behaviour includes fraud, motivated by greed, in the case at hand: making more and more money. In other words, Carrier describes rational decision making of egoistic and materialistically motivated individuals, causing harm to others. Conventionally, this is referred to as opportunistic behaviour. Hence, really existing individuals demonstrate features of a *Homo oeconomicus* as portrayed in the economic model. It could be added that some people are even much worse in a real world context, i.e. those individuals who reveal anti-social preferences and reduce their own material wellbeing – something a *Homo oeconomicus* would never do – in order to derive utility by harming others (Zizzo & Oswald 2001). Be it as it may, this

comment is not about terminology and economic deviance is, apart from opportunistic behaviour, also a nice ascription.

From Carrier's description it can be inferred that situations exist in which persons behave exactly as predicted by the *Homo oeconomicus* model, and, furthermore, that such behaviour is harmful to societies at large. The Great Recession has given an abundance of evidence thereof. One corollary is that the model, as applied in microeconomics, is applicable in specific situations and can predict decisions of those 'greedy "rotten apples"', to use Carrier's phrasing. Given the fatal consequences of negative externalities that such behaviour of the few may cause for many, the model has its value. Surely, this does not imply that all individuals behave all the time like a nasty *Homo oeconomicus*. However, individual behaviour that has contributed to the Great Recession confirms, by and large, the correctness of microeconomic approaches (neoclassical, institutional and also behavioural economics). To ignore the fact that utility maximizing behaviour exists in real world situations and not to take precaution against it, would mean to learn nothing from the causes that have led to the Great Recession. Carrier clearly shows that this is a relevant topic for anthropologists.

Secondly, leaving the individualistic Malinowski-style analysis and addressing Durkheim's superordinate system (Carrier 2013: 5), a glimpse into approaches in new institutional economics may provide findings pertinent to topics addressed by Carrier. If institutions are not God-given but man-made, then humans will also always detect loopholes in the institutional settings if they are willing to violate them in order to increase their individual utility. And since all institutions, such as laws, markets, networks, value systems, and so forth, are incomplete, loopholes always exist. Regarding individuals as institutionally embedded (in whatsoever institution) is a useful heuristic. However, the heuristic fails if

a person ignores these institutions and the costs related to them, but rather behaves as the model predicts. The *Homo oeconomicus* will use loopholes in the institutional setting in order to maximize private utility. This is independent of whether the rules, e.g. laws, are clear or not.

Leaving Carrier's, indeed valuable, behavioural explanations of bandwagon behaviour aside, the decisive aspect is: can humans and societies create or shape institutions that limit opportunistic behaviour which causes a threat to society as a whole? That is one of the essential questions economists have posed for centuries. In order to find contestable answers, it is useful to assume that some individuals behave sometimes as *Homines oeconomici* and that their behaviour has to be controlled by institutional settings. There is little disagreement about that (e.g. Greenspan 2007).

Thirdly, Carrier formulates the task 'to ask questions about the nature of the corporations and institutions that we have created and allowed to flourish'. This is, no doubt, the right thing to do using the anthropologists' toolkit. However, follow-up questions arise that are to be answered, too: what will be done to solve the problems arising out of the questions and findings? Asking questions is essential, but finding and implementing viable answers requires more than that. If institutional settings determine individual behaviour by individual embeddedness, then these institutions have to be constructed or shaped. That, however, needs theories of behaviour that go beyond description and these theories should be able to predict behaviour to a certain degree. This begs the essential questions: whether anthropologists, equipped with their expertise, will embark on such a discourse, and are they willing to provide answers to normative questions? The initial impetus for this has been given by Carrier: 'What sort of society do we want [...]?' ●

Henrik Egbert

Anhalt University of Applied Sciences
h.egbert@wi.hs-anhalt.de

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research I was conducting as a professional anthropologist. In fact, some had taken sociology and anthropology classes in college and were familiar with fieldwork.

3. I am a midwestern *shin-nisei* whereas most of my *shin-nisei* interviewees were born and raised in California.

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