



EXPLORE

MIT ANTHROPOLOGY FACULTY

Jean JACKSON

Professor of Anthropology - Emeritus
Margaret MacVicar Faculty Fellow
 Room E53-335F · 617-253-6953
jjackson@mit.edu

Biography

Jean E. Jackson received her B.A. from Wellesley College in Sociology/Anthropology in 1965, and her M.A. (1966) and Ph.D. (1972) from Stanford University. She began teaching at MIT in the fall of 1972. She has carried out fieldwork in Mexico, Guatemala, and, from 1968 to the present, in Colombia, initially in the Central Northwest Amazon. Her earlier research interests included kinship and marriage, gender, anthropological linguistics, regional analysis, and multidimensional scaling analysis of genealogical data. She published *The Fish People: Linguistic Exogamy and Tukanoan Identity in Northwest Amazonia* in 1983.

In 1985 she began to examine indigenous mobilizing in Colombia, with a focus on the role of the State and NGOs. In 1989 she published the first English language article on this topic and, subsequently, twenty essays and a co-edited book.

She has also published essays on missionaries, anthropological fieldwork and fieldnotes, the Colombian conflict, rights-claiming discourses, and ethical issues in anthropological fieldwork.

In 1986 she conducted ethnographic research in an inpatient chronic pain center. "Camp Pain": Conversations with Chronic Pain Patients, and nine essays report on this research. In 2009 she published an essay on mind/body coordination in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*.

She is currently working on a book, *The Colombian Indigenous Movement and the Multicultural Neoliberal State, 1990-2010*.

She has served on the Board of Directors of Cultural Survival since 1997.

She is a Margaret MacVicar Faculty Fellow.

Research**Indigenous social identity**

Much of her work has been concerned with social identity. Her earlier research focused on the language exogamy system among Tukanoans in the Colombian Vaupés. A 1974 essay on the topic of Tukanoan language identity is still used in courses. In the mid-1980s she became interested in the remarkable shift from state assimilationist policies to multiculturalist ones occurring in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America. Specific concerns motivating this research include the valorization of indigenous difference, the impact that state and indigenous mobilizing efforts have on each other, indigenous self-representation, para-statal and transnational actors, customary law, reindigenization, and the politics of culture. She is currently working on a book, *The Colombian Indigenous Movement and the Multicultural Neoliberal State, 1990-2010*.

Chronic Pain

Another research area is the anthropology of chronic pain, with a focus on: 1) the definitional difficulties produced, in part, by pain's invisibility and ontological and epistemological uncertainty; 2) therapeutic community as a clinical approach; 3) pain's location at the mind/body interface (pain's aversiveness—an emotion—creates challenges for biomedicine); 4) stigmatizing processes accompanying chronic pain; and 5) the way that the painful body simultaneously produces, and is produced by, culture.

Selected Publications

- 2011 [Bodies and Pain](#). In Frances E. Mascia-Lees, ed., *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*. Wiley-Blackwell: 370-387.
- 2009 [Traditional, transnational and cosmopolitan: The Colombian Yanacoona look to the past and to the future](#) (with María Clemencia Ramirez). *American Ethnologist* 36(3): 521-544.
- 2009 [The cross-cultural evidence on 'extreme behaviors': What can it tell us?](#) *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1172: 270-277.
- 2007 [Rights to indigenous culture in Colombia](#). In Mark Goodale and Sally Merry, eds., *Transnationalism and the New Legal Order: Tracking Rights between the Global and the Local*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 204-241.
- 2005 [Indigenous movements in Latin America, 1992-2004: controversies, ironies, new directions](#). Jean E. Jackson and Kay B.

2005 Stigma, liminality, and chronic pain: mind-body borderlands. *American Ethnologist* 32(3): 332-353.

2005 How to narrate chronic pain? The politics of representation. In Daniel B. Carr, John D. Loeser, David B. Morris, eds.: *Narrative, Pain and Suffering*. Seattle: IASP Press: 229-242.

To see a full publication list with links to downloadable PDFs, please [click here](#).

Teaching

21A.101J / WGS.170J

Identity and Difference

This course explores how identities, whether of individuals or groups, are produced, maintained, and transformed. Students will be introduced to various theoretical perspectives that deal with identity formation, including constructions of “the normal.” We will explore the utility of these perspectives for understanding identity components such as gender, sexual orientation, social class, race, ethnicity, religion, and bodily difference. By semester’s end students will understand better how an individual can be at once cause and consequence of society, a unique agent of social action as well as a social product.

21A.102

Ethnic and National Identity

This subject looks at the evolution of concepts about ethnic and national identity over time, in both social science and everyday life. We explore the history of notions about what constitutes a “nation,” in the sense of a “people,” looking at what the term meant prior to the European nation-state and imperial projects of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and at what it means in the present era of multiculturalism, postmodernity, globalization, and transnational trends such as migration. We examine how both ethnic and nation-state nationalism create narratives about the past that are intended to address present-day problems. We also look at the related concepts of race, religion, gender, and culture, examining how each one entails the others. We also study how ethnic and national identity in the West are seen in terms of shared biological legacies, shared histories, and shared cultural content, conceived in terms of 1) shared patterns of behavior—music, dress, food styles, embodied habits (e.g., posture), etc., and 2) inner qualities such as character, personality, or talent. Language ideologies are also briefly discussed, with an emphasis on how linguistic features (lexicon, phonology) serve non-linguistic purposes, for instance, signaling ethnic or national identity.

21A.301

Disease and Health: Culture, Society, and Ethics

This course looks at medicine from a cross-cultural perspective, focusing on the human, as opposed to biological, side of things. Students examine the role of society and culture in sickness and healing, learning how to analyze and contextualize various kinds of medical practice. Particular emphasis is placed on Western (bio-) medicine; students examine the foundational premises of biomedicine and its understanding of disease, health, body, and mind. Students learn about medical institutions (e.g., hospitals, medical schools) and how they articulate with other institutions, national (e.g., pharmaceutical and insurance companies, Congress), and international (e.g., World Health Organization). Other topics include notions about symbolic healing (and harming), shamanism, organ harvesting, and new reproductive technologies.

21A.852

Seminar in Anthropological Theory

This course introduces students to some of the major social theories and debates that inspire and inform anthropological analysis. Over the course of the semester we will investigate a range of theoretical propositions concerning such topics as human agency, structure, subjectivity, power, culture, the politics of representation, and globalization. It is not a survey of major theoretical schools. We will approach each theoretical perspective or proposition on three levels: 1) in terms of its analytical or explanatory power for understanding human behavior and the social world; 2) in the context of the social and historical circumstances in which these perspectives and propositions were produced; and 3) as contributions to ongoing dialogues and debates. The weekly seminars are organized by topic, but the sequence is roughly determined by chronology.

Awards

2004 Margaret MacVicar Faculty Fellow

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- CV (pdf)
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MIT Anthropology
77 Mass. Ave, E53-335, Cambridge, MA 02142
ph: 617.452.2837 fax: 617.253.5363 anthro@mit.edu

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