Interview with Professor Hyang Jin Jung, Chair, Department of Anthropology, Seoul National University

Virginia R. Dominguez
Associate Editor for World Anthropology

Emily Metzner
Editorial Assistant for the World Anthropology section

Hyang Jin Jung is a professor and the current chair of the Department of Anthropology at Seoul National University in South Korea. She received her PhD in 2001 in cultural anthropology from the University of Minnesota, in the United States. Her research interests lie at the intersection of culture, self, and emotion, with the US and North Korea as her primary anthropological sites. Her ongoing research projects include the emotional culture of contemporary postmodern US society and the psychocultural underpinnings of North Korean statehood and society. She is author of Learning to Be an Individual: Emotion and Person in an American Junior High School (2007).

Virginia R. Dominguez (VRD): Can you tell us about your work? I know you study both the United States and North Korea, isn’t that so? How did you come to choose these sites?

Hyang Jin Jung (HJJ): When I came to the US for a doctoral degree, I had Korea in mind for my dissertation work. To me, South Korea, where I was born and raised, was the strangest place in the world and deserved a full anthropological inquiry. After I finished my master’s degree at Seoul National University, I collected extensive field notes over several years while working as a teacher and doing participant-observation in a junior high school. I planned to use these notes for my future PhD work. Then at the University of Minnesota, I had an opportunity to do a field study in an American high school for an ethnographic methods course. That was truly my first serious “cross-cultural” experience. During the fieldwork at the high school, I kept asking questions that were very important to Korean teachers but “unfamiliar” to the American teachers. The coexistence of similarities and differences between Korean and American schools gave me a visceral understanding of what anthropology is all about, I think. So I decided to take an anthropological detour by doing PhD work about adolescent socialization in a junior high school in the US. After that, I was going to do South Korea. But then, after I returned to South Korea, I joined a research team that worked with North Korean refugees. To my generation of South Koreans, growing up under heavy anti-Communist ideological education, North Korea did not even exist on planet earth. The work with North Korean refugees presented fascinating anthropological questions, again from an amalgam of the familiar and the unfamiliar, North Korea soon became my other anthropological site. The biggest reward of researching North Korea is my realization that South Korea and North Korea may have walked a very different pathway on the route to modernity, but they are twins mirroring each other—perhaps like long-lost twins who grew up in radically different environments. I said earlier that I started anthropology because I wanted to understand South Korea, and through North Korea, I come to better understand the puzzle that is South Korea. Of course, to us South Koreans, North Korea is an urgent research topic, too.

Now that I do both the US and North Korea, it is interesting that these two countries never talk to each other in reality. They don’t even have a diplomatic relationship. But they constantly talk to each other in me. Each presents theoretical questions to the other, back and forth. For example, the theatricality of North Koreans’ public behavior makes me ask questions about the theatrical nature of self-presentation among Americans and vice versa; the American preoccupation with self-realization leads me to ponder about selfhood among North Koreans under their political circumstances.

VRD: You told me in person that you do not like being interviewed. I think that is probably true of many anthropologists, but you still agreed to being interviewed for the World Anthropology section of American Anthropologist. May I ask why?

HJJ: I have this notion that musicians communicate with their music; politicians with their political actions; writers with writing; and scholars with their scholarly works.

VRD: But you interview lots of people.

HJJ: That’s for my ethnography—it’s different! But maybe, after all the interviews that I’ve asked for, I should sit for one too.

VRD: So why did you agree to be interviewed by me?

HJJ: Well, you asked, and it’s an honor to be interviewed and also maybe an opportunity to talk about Korean anthropology through my case. In no way do I represent Korean anthropology, but I’m based there.

VRD: Is it an honor because it is American Anthropologist?

HJJ: I wouldn’t deny the prestige that American Anthropologist has, but this is a forum for anthropologies from...
different parts of the world to come together through this medium. If this kind of forum existed elsewhere, it would also be an honor to be included there, too.

**VRD**: Since I know that you have done extensive fieldwork in the US, I must ask if the US is a popular area of anthropological study in the Republic of Korea (commonly known in the English-speaking world as South Korea) or if you are actually fairly unusual there. If you think that the US is a popular area of anthropological study in the Republic of Korea, how does it manifest itself? And, if it isn’t, how does that manifest itself?

**HJJ**: My US work is not mainstream in (South) Korea. In Korean academia as a whole, the US is frequently studied, particularly in English literature, political science, international relations, and history. But it is not a popular area in anthropology. For a certain discipline or research area to flourish, there has to be demand and support from the general public. To the Korean public, the US appears too familiar and too distant at the same time to inspire, say, an anthropological romance. It is too familiar through Hollywood and the market. American pop music and Hollywood movies have long been part of “modern” life in Korea. Now Starbucks is on every corner, and the obsession with the English language (especially American English, but in addition to the US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Singapore, and Philippines are frequent destinations for middle-class Koreans studying English abroad) is gripping the whole country. The political and military alliance between South Korea and the US is another factor that makes the US too familiar to the Korean public. However, it is too distant for those of us living on the Korean peninsula, whose immediate regional concerns are mainly in Northeast Asia. The result is that American popular culture and American politics are popular topics and mundane concerns among South Koreans, but American culture—culture as a way of life in a classic anthropological sense—doesn’t seem to have a place in people’s imaginations. It’s interesting, and a bit paradoxical too, that my fieldwork site is in the Midwestern US, when it’s almost as though California (because of Hollywood and Silicon Valley) and Washington, DC (because of the White House) are the two locations that matter to Koreans and the vast in-between, including the Midwest, remains very much muted and unknown to the general public in Korea.

Perhaps another reason that “America” (i.e. the US) is not often seen as an object of anthropological study is that it is seen more as a force than a place where actual people live their lives in their own cultural world, a force that seems to force the rest of the world to become like America. Of course, there are the power relations of knowledge production that shape anthropological study, too. The US has historically been where the anthropologist comes from, not goes to.

Korean anthropologists rarely do their fieldwork in the US. Some did their dissertation work in the US while studying in degree programs there, but once they are based in Korea, the sheer physical distance and perhaps the perceived lack of public interest seem to discourage continuing fieldwork in the US. I should tell you that I struggle to maintain my research program on the US because it is very hard to find an audience in Korea. Even internationally, it’s very hard to find anthropologists based outside the US but studying it. It’s no wonder that I feel intellectually lonely.

Another factor in my intellectual solitude concerns the question of the relevance of anthropology to Korean society. My work on the US presents me with ethnographic scenes and theoretical questions that are just as exciting, challenging, and fascinating as any other “exotic” culture and that are extremely pertinent to contemporary life in South Korea. But when I am faced with this implicit principle that academic research must be (directly) relevant and (immediately) useful to Korean society, I feel like I can’t really justify my US work other than saying that it is going to be useful in the long run. That’s why international relations and English literature are two dominant fields in US studies in South Korea, the former supported by the importance of the political alliance with the US and the latter by “English fever.” Doing anthropology is already a luxury, and doing anthropology of the US seems to be a double luxury.

**VRD**: Are certain topics favored (and other topics not favored) in contemporary Korean anthropology? I was thinking of research specialties, but it might be interesting to think of this also in terms of teaching areas.

**HJJ**: East Asia broadly conceived is the favored regional area, at least in our department. The East Asian focus has three subareas: Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Korean Studies. Our department has historically emphasized East Asia since its founding, first with Northeast Asia and later expanding it to include Southeast Asia. Now that we’ve just received this state funding for graduate student training and internationalization, we want to further strengthen the East Asian focus. The funding from the Korean government is a historic feat on our part. We won it over other very competitive, bigger departments, like sociology and psychology, in both our university and other top universities, which ranked above our department in terms of the number of publications and other quantitative standards of evaluation. So we take this opportunity to really solidify our grounding in both academia and the broader public. The East Asian focus is our attempt to be relevant to Korean society and the region at large, through anthropological engagement. We also want to develop the Korean Studies component more. We think that it is high time for anthropological studies of Korea, particularly because there are international demands on knowledge of Korean culture, many thanks to K-pop and other K-culture industry. Our department is receiving more international applications for graduate training in the anthropology of Korea than ever before. Until recently we have drawn international students most often from China and Japan, but increasingly more applications are coming from other parts of the world as well. Presently we have students from China, Japan, Russia, Kazakhstan, the Emirates, Spain, and the US. International students are...
usually interested in Korean culture and society, but some study their own society, too.

VRD: So they must be fluent in Korean? They take classes in Korean?

HJJ: Yes, they take classes in Korean. In our department, several classes are taught in English by our newly hired Prof. Olga Fedorenko and once in a while by me, but the majority of classes are done in Korean, so international students must be fluent in Korean. The graduate school of Seoul National University allows thesis writing in English, so some international students opt to write their theses in English, especially if English is their first language or they have competency in English. Even then, if they are working on Korean culture and society, we try to train them in academic Korean, because they should be able to utilize the Korean scholarship on their chosen research topic.

Outside our department, there are quite a few Korean anthropologists whose regional specialty is other than East Asia, such as India, Mexico, and Nigeria. Some of our students are doing their work on other areas, too. Uzbekistan, Catalonia, Iran, India, and Cuba are among recent past or current field sites of our master’s and PhD students, while the majority of our students do their fieldwork in various parts of East Asia.

VRD: You chose to come to the US to get graduate training (and you did so at the University of Minnesota). May I ask why? And do you, therefore, tend to see yourself as doing US-style anthropology even if you are based in Korea?

HJJ: My BA was from Pusan National University but in the College of Education. After my master’s degree coursework in anthropology at Seoul National University, I worked in a middle school—a junior high school—for a while as an English teacher. During that time, I also wrote my master’s thesis on teachers’ social organization. After the master’s thesis, as I became more immersed in teaching, I came to develop interests in human development, socialization, and personhood—classic themes in psychological anthropology. I wanted to come to the US for doctoral training simply because anthropology was more developed in the US at that time. Also, a practical reason was that I had some competence in American English; I didn’t want to have to learn another foreign language or a different English for my doctoral studies. Other than that, I didn’t know much. I had some ideas about what I wanted to do in anthropology, but the rest was sort of worked out for me. I was just so fortunate to have two excellent teachers in psychological anthropology, Kathleen Barlow and John Ingham, and one in educational anthropology, Marion Lundy-Dobbert, at the University of Minnesota.

Psychological anthropology still fascinates me, for its ultimate concern about the intertwining relationship between the psyche and the sociocultural world. I really think that psychological anthropology sustains my youthful fascination with anthropology that I felt in my early twenties, when I first discovered it. But because this subdiscipline is a very American one indeed, it heavily relies on American concepts of self, emotion, and person as building blocks. Think about self and emotion. These are key concepts in psychological anthropology, but they are drawn from very individualistic conceptions of the person and psychic process. We all know experientially that emotion is something we personally feel but that it is also social currency. Emotion is generated in the interpersonal and intersubjective arenas and, as such, flows through persons. But the very concept of “emotion” limits our understanding of human emotional life. The concept of “person” is more useful in the Korean context, but “self” is again a heavily (American) culture-laden concept so that we have to be very careful when applying it cross-culturally. I guess any theoretical concept has this risk of being culture bound. We just need to recognize it and try to expand our conceptual tool kit beyond the concepts grounded in the American and Western intellectual and cultural traditions.

Yet South Korea is a great place for psychological anthropology. Affective relationality is a core value among Koreans. There is good reason why Koreans are so adept at creating melodramas for film and television. Korea has a very rich affective culture plus a very complicated relationship with modernity after its dynastic history.

VRD: Have you considered working in the US?

HJJ: I am often asked that question, both by Koreans and Americans. Something about me invites that question, it seems. I always felt a little bit outside Korean culture. Korea is a puzzle to me. Other Koreans tell me I’m a little “off”—that I’m like an American in some ways. My childhood friend told me that I’ve always been this way, even before studying in the US. Maybe it has something to do with Korean sociability and my introversion. I need a lot of space. In Korea, people place a high value on being sociable. I never liked engaging in everyday sociability, but I am not reserved when it comes to intellectual debate and emotional expression. So, my general shyness combined with expressiveness and straightforwardness may be [viewed as] an interesting combination. I am feeling very reluctant to discuss this personal feature of myself. Whatever that is, my sense of being “psychoculturally” at the periphery of Korean society makes me an anthropological observer of my own society and drawn to psychological anthropology.

But when I am in the US, I feel acutely that I am Korean after all—yes, psychoculturally and otherwise. I have certainly familiarized myself with some aspects of American culture, especially through my fieldwork experiences, but that has nurtured my intercultural sensibility more than anything. Also, in the US, I am seen as a “scholar of color.” I was taken aback upon first hearing the phrase “scholars of color” at a conference. Color: I imagine colors, colorful, hues. I instantly thought of pink, blue, green, so I didn’t comprehend the term at first, but then I realized that the person meant scholars of “minority” backgrounds in the US and that this term referred to me whether I liked it or not. My own preferred identification would be as an “international scholar” instead of a scholar of color. I say this, because people
outside the US do not necessarily see the world according to the racial terms used in the US. I know that the term “scholars of color” is not meant to apply to international scholars, but in some sense it does apply.

**VRD**: How are you perceived by colleagues in Japan? China?

**HJJ**: In Japan, I am seen as a Korean scholar. In China, as Korean.

**VRD**: In fact, what relationship is there, or has there been, in your country with anthropology in Japan, or anthropology in China, anthropology in Russia, anthropology in the US, anthropology in Taiwan, anthropology in North Korea, or elsewhere? Many of these are very large countries. Some have colonized or at least occupied the Korean peninsula for some years, and some are (or have been) outright enemies of the Republic of Korea (South Korea).

**HJJ**: We talk about “East Asia” as a region, but East Asia as such seems to be a fiction when there is so much political and military tension. Yet it is becoming a reality more and more, I think, with the increasing interdependence of the countries it represents, first and foremost through the market. China, Korea, and Japan in Northeast Asia have long had a history of contestation and rivalry as well as cooperation. In the already-complicated regional dynamics, the USSR (now Russia) and the US entered the region in the early 20th century and more directly at the end of WWII, the Korean peninsula becoming the chief politico-military stage of the old and new regional drama.

Korea is in the midst of all of these superpowers that seek to maintain influence there. Japan, China, and even Russia are so close by, and the US has military troops in South Korea, and we have North Korea too. I guess that regional histories can be very complex anywhere, but no other country has all the superpowers as either their neighbors (friends or foes) or allies. Historically, the challenge for Korea has been to steer its own course through the powers. Culturally, this situation leads to the Korean preoccupation with cultural identity, combined with national pride. I can only say that Korea is a fascinating place for anthropological study.

Today, peace in the region appears very precarious. I think that for anyone in the region, and for Koreans in particular, regional peace is not something that can be compromised for nationalist causes or anything. Our department as a community of anthropologists views mutual understanding as crucial to regional peace building, in which anthropology should take active part. As I mentioned earlier, the East Asian focus of our department represents our attempt to be relevant to the region.

**VRD**: Is (South) Korea not best seen as “colonized”?

**HJJ**: Oh, you have to be careful there! It is true that US troops did not retreat from the peninsula after the Korean War, instead making permanent bases in many parts of the country, which is something that North Korea always makes an issue of. But rather than a colonial encroachment, this is better seen as a military alliance between South Korea and the US, born of mutual national interests—South Korea enhances defense capacity against North Korea while the US pursues its agenda in Northeast Asia. Koreans as a nation are a people very proud of their history and identity. Just note the fact that Korea has remained to this day a people with a distinct tradition and cultural identity, in between China and Japan throughout their long history, despite the many invasions, subordination, and even colonization. As I mentioned, the US and the former Soviet Union recently entered this old historical and regional drama surrounding the Korean peninsula, further complicating the already-complicated regional situation. Most Koreans are not so naive as to believe that US troops are in South Korean territory only for the interests of South Korea, but if US troops are the price we have to pay for deterring North Korea, that’s what we pay. But to me, and I believe to almost all Koreans, it hurts to be thought of as “colonized.” Some of us intellectuals, of course, talk about Korean society being in a neocolonial situation, but “being in a neocolonial situation” is not the same as “colonized.” We know all too well what it is like being colonized.

**VRD**: I hope I didn’t cross the line there. I posed that question more as a Latin American and (at least part of the time) a Latin Americanist than as an interviewer for *AA*.

**HJJ**: Yes, any interview involves inter-viewing, so the interviewer is revealed too!

**VRD**: I absolutely agree. Speaking of North Korea, do you or your colleagues tend to view North Korea in a certain way? You also do anthropological work that focuses on North Korea, but are you unusual among your South Korean colleagues in doing that, or is there serious widespread interest and work on North Korea among anthropologists in the Republic of Korea?

**HJJ**: Yes, North Korea plays a big role in Korean thinking and is studied seriously in many disciplines. But doing anthropology on North Korea is not easy, if not impossible. There are several Korean anthropologists who produced great anthropological works on North Korea, mostly on the political culture. I think that I, as a psychological anthropologist, am in a better position to do anthropology of North Korea, compared to general sociocultural anthropologists. The North Korean propaganda materials, which are my main data, are like a treasure trove to a psychological anthropologist. North Korea may be an extreme case, but for this reason, it is a case in point to show how the state utilizes the psychocultural ground of the society and culturally constituted psychodynamics of individuals for its political purposes.

I would love to do fieldwork in North Korea, but that is not possible at the moment. Once, on a tourist trip to Kum Gang San, although the village life was shrouded from the tourists along the roads, I could see glimpses through the cracks in the barriers. I wanted to get off the bus and walk across the barrier and talk to people. At the mountain, there were North Korean vendors. I wanted to ask them about their lives, but I couldn’t. We had to be very careful.

**VRD**: You are now chair of your department at SNU (Seoul National University). I presume that means that your
colleagues (or at least the deans) trust you. Do you think that you and your work are seen as examples in (South) Korea of really good anthropological work being done now and perhaps even the kind of anthropological work stressed as good for the near future?

HJJ: It is our custom to have all full professors take their turn as chair, and it was my turn shortly after I was promoted. But I think my colleagues do trust me.

VRD: Can you tell us about the grant you’ve been awarded?

HJJ: My colleagues and I have recently been awarded a very big grant from the national government to really develop and train students in a globally oriented type of social science, this grant program being called “Brain Korea 21.” We are very excited about this. It started in the spring semester of 2016. The grant money is about 350,000 USD per year, totaling around 1,600,000 USD for four and a half years. Approximately 60 percent of the money will be spent on scholarships and fellowships for our graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, and the rest will be spent on other internationalization efforts. Our students have had some funding for attending international conferences, exchange programs, and overseas fieldwork, but now with this grant, we will be able to fund more students and more money for such activities. Along with the existing support from the university, this grant will be a big boost for our graduate students. Editorial costs for writing and publishing in academic English is another area that we will be spending the money on. We’ll be training students to be scholars in both Korean and English. And... oh dear. It’s difficult. We still want them to produce strong scholarship in Korean.

VRD: Your own department consists largely of sociocultural anthropologists, with one biological anthropologist and one linguistic anthropologist, if I remember correctly. Archaeologists are employed elsewhere on your campus. Are these numbers a reflection of how anthropology is generally perceived in the Republic of Korea (South Korea), and is this largely the result of US anthropological influence or Japanese anthropological influence?

HJJ: Anthropology in (South) Korea didn’t really develop until the 1970s, when our department at Seoul National University was established. In our university, archaeology is in a department that is joint with art history and is located in the College of Humanities. Anthropology is a separate department in the College of Social Sciences. We started as a joint department with archaeology in 1961, but we separated and moved to social sciences in 1975. Our department has one biological anthropologist (trained in the US, who does biometrics and osteology), one linguistic anthropologist, and one anthropologist in folklore studies (trained in Germany). Our predecessors decided that folklore studies should be part of our department. We are 11 in total, including an upcoming replacement hire this fall. Out of the current ten faculty members, one does biological work and the other nine are considered sociocultural anthropologists, broadly conceived. The biological anthropologist is a relatively recent addition, so we have yet to see how the subfield will “evolve” in the department. In fact, we are the only anthropology department in Korea that has the biological subfield. I think that the composition we have reflects both US anthropology (because we incorporate biological anthropology and linguistic anthropology) and the German tradition of folklore studies, the latter probably via Japan. In the early 20th century, Japan introduced folklore studies to colonial Korea, which became a nationalist enterprise to many intellectuals at the time. In Korea, the field of folklore studies garners more popular appeal than anthropology, due to the public’s longing for the “lost tradition.” So our department wants to capitalize on this public support for researching traditional culture and folkways.

VRD: How is anthropology perceived in South (and even North) Korean universities? Is it not a large discipline, right? Is it considered a social science? Is it considered a liberal–leftist or progressive discipline, a politically conservative discipline, or something else altogether?

HJJ: Institutionally, archaeology is considered independent of anthropology and part of the humanities, aligned with history, art history, or cultural anthropology. Anthropology varies. In some universities, it is in the college of humanities and in others, in the college of social sciences. It is often combined with archaeology in regional universities under the name “department of archaeology and cultural anthropology.” Overall, there are ten universities and one graduate institute (Academy of Korean Studies) with an anthropology department or program, either jointly or independently. In the Seoul metropolitan area, there are five, including Seoul National University. The other six are in regional universities. In general, anthropology departments are small and constantly face the question of relevance to Korean society, the question to which major social sciences like economics, political science, and sociology have been “providing” more generally recognized answers.

The number of anthropologists who are institutionally employed is around 120, while the membership of the Korean Society for Cultural Anthropology numbers over 250. Other than anthropology departments, many are employed in general divisions and some other departments like sociology, human ecology, or religious studies. Some are in research institutes and museums, too.

The ideological spectrum is different in (South) Korea, at least in part because of North Korea. If you are too “leftist,” there is the danger of being seen as a Communist, in line with North Korea. People tend to be more conservative because of that, although I note that the strong cultural value placed on communalism and egalitarianism compensates for the ideological constraint to some degree. I would think that anthropologists in general tend to be on the “liberal” side in social issues.

However, in the public’s perception, anthropology as a discipline is perhaps considered “something else” altogether, something that is wonderfully interesting and [that] you
would do only if you didn’t have to worry about how to earn a living. Last semester, when we did an undergradu-
ate conference in our department, undergraduate students staged a drama about what anthropology is to them. One 
student said, “Students in other departments like economics 
complain about how difficult their study is; well, anthropol-
yogy is even more difficult, because we have to explain what it is.” It was hilarious, and I thought that line well reflected the positioning of anthropology in the university as well as in the general public.

**VRD**: Is there an effort these days to create a specifically 
Korean anthropology, and would this be something you would support? Do you ever worry that such a question or movement could just lead anthropologists in the Republic of Korea to be antagonistic to other anthropologists outside the Republic of Korea or at least not very interested in what anthropologists do around the world?

**HJJ**: At least in our department, in recent years, we have taken seriously the possibility and feasibility of “Korean anthropology” within the kind of constraints we have, like anthropology’s marginal position in Korean academia and the immense pressures for academic globalization. Since 2014, our department has held a series of international conferences to explore and promote Korean anthropology and at the same time to expose our graduate students to global trends in anthropology. By Korean anthropology, we do not mean to be antagonistic to other anthropologists or anthropologies outside Korea. Far from it. Our intention is to establish an intellectual tradition of anthropology that is open to global engagement yet reflects our particular concerns and intellectual heritage as Korean anthropologists. Just to take a metaphor: I am not a fan of K-pop, but still it sparks inspiration. Who would have thought K-pop and “Gangnam Style” would become the global phenomena they have become? Pop music as a genre was obviously imported from the West, and the US in particular, but I believe the “K” part of K-pop is what gives it global appeal, whatever that appeal may be. “Gangnam Style” is a satire on the fast-tracked affluence that South Korean society has achieved. As such, it humorously and brilliantly takes issue with the kind of modernity and modernization that South Korea has so relentlessly embraced. I know that an academic discipline cannot be produced and promoted like the culture industry, but I dream of something like K-anthropology.

K-anthropology would be part of, and contribute to, the “global commons” of anthropological knowledge by bringing in theoretical and ethnographic dimensions salient in the Korean context yet with broader implications, such as state–society relations, affective relationality, and familism (e.g., in markets, social organization, and politics), as well as by engaging in theoretical and ethnographic dialogues with other anthropologies from global and regional traditions.

We tend to think of globalization as Westernization, Americanization, but I envision more centers of influence. That’s the opportunity for Korean anthropology—moving beyond “the West and the rest.”

**Emily Metzner (EM)**: What did you mean when you said that the US is a “reference point” more than an object of study?

**HJJ**: In scholarship, the perception tends to be that works by American scholars are the works that ought to be referred to and cited. In the real world, too, at least in Korea, in policy making and organizational structuring—for example, in education, welfare, and industry—the US model is often taken to be the model to refer to. It is difficult then to relativize American scholarship and US models, to view them as one of many possible options. This is, I think, related to the lack of anthropological studies of the US. At the heart of doing anthropology is relativizing a given cultural phenomenon in the comparative horizon, but the US seems to be located outside the comparative horizon. It is ironic that the US as a society values and promotes diversity, but “America” as a reference point to the rest of the world drives uniformity rather than diversity. I am not saying that the American people are driving this. It seems that “America” as a force, phenomenon, or condition is something that all of us on the globe face, including Americans.

**VRD**: Are there questions you wish I had asked here? If so, please tell me and proceed to answer it (or them) here.

**HJJ**: No, but thank you, Virginia and Emily, for your incisive and daring questions! Thank you also for being such attentive interlocutors. This was wonderful. Like any good interview, this interview compelled me to look back and forward, and in and out. Me as a psychological anthropologist, as an anthropologist of the US and North Korea, and as a Korean anthropologist, all at once. Many thanks and cheers to the World Anthropology section and world anthropologies.

**Roundtable: Between World Anthropologies and World Anthropology: Toward a Reflexive Critique of the Mediation Processes**

**Anthropologies and Anthropology in Tension: A Preface**

**Susana Narotzky**

*Universitat de Barcelona, Spain*

The articles by Gordon Mathews, Yasmeen Arif, and Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima came out of a roundtable organized by the Committee for World Anthropologies (CWA) of the AAA, with the sponsorship of the WCAA (World Council of Anthropological Associations), at the 2015 AAA Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado. The idea was to revisit the accomplishments and challenges of World