

AAMES Newsletter

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Editorial: Farewell to AAMES?

Not quite ten years ago, the Chair of AAMES at that time, Cynthia Tysick, exhorted the AAMES membership to get more involved. Back then, there was remarkable disinterest in committee service to AAMES and ACRL's leaders had become "concerned with our section's increasing struggle to find members to serve on the executive committee" (p. 1 of the November 2005 issue). Tysick suggested that AAMES transition to a discussion group and called for serious discussion via email and at ALA meetings; for the most part, that discussion did not happen. Around that time, I recall going to a midwinter AAMES meeting and the only attendees were the minutes taker, a non-member hoping to run into an old colleague, and me. AAMES has stumbled along since then, having a small resurgence of interest, but now we are back to a time when committees consist of one or two people and the section is essentially run by a small handful of people who cycle through the various leadership positions. AAMES is moribund.

As discussed in last year's Spring newsletter, ACRL has changed its policies regarding sections. As you can see from the Midwinter meeting minutes on page 2, the AAMES Executive Committee has to create a plan for transitioning from being a standalone section. This plan is due by the next Midwinter meeting and would need to be implemented by 2016. The Executive Committee has been discussing plans for increasing membership for about two years, though our membership dropped again this past year. If membership is decreasing, what is the next step? What is the leadership of AAMES planning to do?

What is the plan for the future of AAMES? From the Midwinter meeting minutes, the plan seems to be ... to try things to increase membership, which amounts to rearranging the furniture on a sinking ship. I see a couple of options. The first option, which seems the most likely to come to pass in the absence of any serious action, is AAMES loses its section status and becomes a discussion group. Discussion groups are designed to support conversations around timely topics with minimal leadership infrastructure to encourage low-cost, flexible communities. An AAMES discussion group could simply host an annual forum for area studies librarians to share their work. Such an approach would need only a few committed individuals who would be responsible for putting together the forum and taking care of getting a room, so no committees and no (or at least very few) meetings. The other option is to merge with another section. There are obvious synergies with ANSS, WESS, SEES, and AFAS. A few people have suggested creating something like an International Studies (IS) Section, which would at least contain AAMES and SEES (WESS would make sense here, too, but I can't imagine they would want to merge as they have a pretty vibrant section). The advantage with a broader IS section is that AAMES could still have a functional identity within it and there would be room to add other areas of focus. A new IS section could also integrate subject specialties not currently well-represented in ACRL: Latin American Studies comes to mind, but also what about History or Religious Studies? There are a lot of exciting possibilities that could come out of merging with one or more sections, but AAMES leadership has not shown an inclination to take this route. Whatever AAMES leadership does or does not do, it is clear that in one or two years, AAMES will be very different.

This is my last issue as editor. I have done this for four years and since my job also changed last year (I am no longer a subject specialist of any kind), it seemed like time to move on and let someone else take over. Thanks to all of the authors and committee members over the last four years, but a special thank you to Blake Robinson who has been consistently helpful with this newsletter.

AAMES Executive Committee Minutes (Midwinter Meeting)

Agenda

Welcome and Introductions
Current chair report (Shuyong Jiang)
Greetings from Vice Chair (Jingfeng Xia)
Greeting from ACRL Board Liaison for AAMES (Marilyn Ochoa)
Committee reports
Discussion: Strategies for increasing membership
AAMES Forum in ALA 2014 Annual Conference (Hong Cheng)
AAMES e-mail list and committee volunteers
Old and New business
Announcements

Minutes

Attendees: Shuyong Jiang, Marilyn Ochoa (ACRL), Allison Payne (ACRL), Hong Cheng, Ping Situ, Binh P. Le, Atoma Batoma, Jingfeng Xia (recorder)

Excused: Deepa Banerjee

Started at 10:00AM CST via Adobe Connect

Shuyong (Chair) welcomed everyone; and Marilyn and Jingfeng introduced themselves to the group.

The first topic to be discussed was the future of AAMES. Marilyn responded to inquiries by stating that ACRL was looking for a plan from AAMES for possible change to one of the communities of practice options including changing to a discussion group or interest group. She asked for the plan by Midwinter in 2015, and the transition would need to be completed by 2016. Marilyn hoped the topic would be shared and discussed with AAMES members.

Several board members asked the possibility of extending this merger deadline. They pointed to the following reasons::

- ACRL needs to consider the majority status of AAMES;
- Both ALA and ACRL have experienced a membership decrease, and policy needs to be revised to reflect this;
- ACRL should not be a solely Euro-American association, and needs to emphasize diversity;
- The 400 members threshold is no longer realistic, at least to minority groups.

Marilyn reminded everyone that the policy was carefully discussed and developed by an ACRL Task Force and discussed at leadership meetings, with multiple opportunities for input, until it was approved by the Board. Therefore, she urged AAMES to start working on a transitioning plan soon. Marilyn explained that by transitioning to another community of practice, AAMES members would still have a voice and place of community and identity or similar. Yet, the participants insisted that minorities' voice should be listened at a different level. Marilyn agreed to take AAMES board members' comments to ACRL for consideration, but could not guarantee anything.

The topic then turned to membership retention. The participants discussed various strategies for increasing the number of its members, such as doing more activities and reaching out to current and potential members by activating online forums, a Facebook site, and listserv discussions. Some participants also planned to use the opportunities of attending other related meetings, e.g., CEAL and CALA, to promote AAMES membership. Marilyn mentioned that ALA has just changed its membership pricing to allow a member to join as many as 3 sections for free of charge. It allowed 2 free sections

Digital East Asia (continued from p. 2)

before. The pricing goes into effect September 2014. All participants agreed that this is a big selling point to drawing new members.

Ping Situ, Chair of the Membership Committee, reported that AAMES membership dropped about 5% by November 2013. The number of AAMES members was 269 by November 2013 (according to the most recent ACRL report) in comparison to 283 during the same time of 2012; renewed members were 10 in 2013 in comparison to 15 in 2012; and new members were 5 in 2013 in comparison to 6 in 2012. Relatively, the international members and student members are stable groups. Emails have been sent to all the members who are new or have reinstated their membership and also to dropped members. No response has been received from any of them. Marilyn suggested making phone calls to the dropped members to find out why and encourage them to rejoin AAMES. She also suggested using student members as volunteers for future committee work.

Hong Cheng, Chair of the Program Committee, reported on meeting proposals for the upcoming ACRL and ALA conferences. For the 2014 ALA conference, AAMES is going to host a forum with the subject "Migration 1914-2014" which features four speakers on various topics of discussion: "Jewish refugees in Shanghai during the World War II," by David Hirsch and Hong Chen; "Indian migration to the U.S.," by Deepa Banerjee; "Korean migrations to the U.S.," by Songhun Cho; and "Asian immigrants in Japan," by Yoko Okunishi. The committee is going to work on proposals for ACRL and ALA conferences in 2015, aside from its planned forum at the ALA Annual 2014. The 2015 ACRL conference has a deadline on May 9, 2014.

The participants agreed on the following efforts in the near future:

- Working on a petition to ACRL to explain that AAMES as a minority group can never catch the level of some other sections for its number of membership, and so ACRL should lower the number of membership for AAMES from 400 to 300
- ACRL should encourage diversity and keep AAMES as an independent section
- ACRL should at least grant an extension for AAMES to work on membership promotion (e.g., moving the 2016 deadline to 2018)
- Working on various strategies of increasing the number of membership
- Creating a Facebook account
- Using different channels to contact current members, dropped members, and potential members
- Using ALA's language of the membership change (free for 3 sections) to promote membership
- Starting the process of transitioning and downgrading and present a feasible plan at Midwinter in 2015.

New to AAMES?

Make sure that you're subscribed to the AAMES listserv. If you are not already subscribed, you can do so by sending SUBSCRIBE AAMES-L [your name] in a message to sympa@ala.org (leave the subject line blank).

Visit AAMES online at:

<http://aamesacrll.wordpress.com>

World Beat

Welcome to the Spring 2014 edition of *World Beat*! The title under review this time is *Spear of the Nation* by Janet Cherry, part of the Ohio Short Histories of Africa Series. Cherry is an academic at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Given Mandela's recent passing, I thought it would be fitting to review a book about MK, the African National Congress's (ANC) armed wing. The book's subject matter stands in stark contrast to the popular media image of Mandela as a dovish peacemaker. However, while the book is rich in detail, it suffers from a number of flaws that negate its appeal as a "short" history.

To her credit, Cherry presents a compelling argument. She argues that "there is a strong case to be made that MK's armed struggle will be remembered as an example of a just war conducted with considerable restraint" (p. 133). First, the MK were waging a war of liberation, not a civil war, so they took care to minimize casualties among black and white and avoided weapons such as anti-personnel mines that are still common in neighboring states (2012). Second, they sent most of their forces to train in friendly neighboring countries. Thanks to the low-intensity warfare tactics that the ANC favored, most of these men and women never saw action in South Africa, and there was tension during and after the peace process among the MK due to this fact (2012). Finally, the post-apartheid government moved swiftly to integrate many MK members into the racially mixed South African National Defence Force (SANDF), so the legitimacy of the new state was thus easier to uphold (2012).

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Cherry incorporates a wealth of data into her work, in particular extensive oral histories with former MK members. However, the book's presentation overshadows the merits of her research. Of course, the author is South African and writes in South African academic English, but this is not the issue. Rather, the author's writing style itself is not very accessible, South African English or not. Combined with a lack of both visuals and footnotes, the book makes for a compelling yet often frustrating read.

To illustrate, Cherry often introduces an organization by its initials alone, and the reader is left to wonder helplessly what those initials might stand for. At one point, she discusses the PEBCO Three, "a trio of [Port Elizabeth] community leaders who were abducted and murdered by a covert unit of the Security Police in April 1985" (p. 88). However, I had to consult an outside source to learn that "PEBCO" stands for "Port Elizabeth's Black Civic Organization" (Buur, 2006, p. 738). In a similar vein, Cherry expects readers to infer that MK leader Albert Luthuli was also known as "the Chief" without explicitly stating so (pp. 15–16). Such an inference may be reasonable to expect from South African undergraduates but not American ones.

In sum, I would recommend this book for academic libraries whose campuses have strong African studies programs or for librarians who liaise with faculty researching South Africa. However, I cannot recommend ordering it outside of these circumstances, as it is simply too inaccessible to most readers. Rather, most general monographs on the apartheid era, along with subscription databases and government information, should suit most libraries' needs.

References

Buur, L. (2006). Reordering society: Vigilantism and expressions of sovereignty in Port Elizabeth's townships. *Development and Change*, 37, 735–757. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7660.2006.00499.x

Cherry, J. (2012). *Spear of the nation (Umkhonto weSizwe): South Africa's liberation army, 1960s-1990s*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

ALA Annual AAMES Forum

AAMES will be hosting a research forum at this year's ALA Annual Conference in Las Vegas.

Migration, 1914-2014: Asia, Africa, Middle East, and the World
Saturday, June 28, 2014 from 1:00-2:30pm
Place: TBA

Presentations:

1. Jewish Refugees in Shanghai, China, during the Second World War, Organized and/or Presented by David Hirsch and Hong Cheng
2. Indian Migration to the United States, Presented by Deepa Banerjee
3. African Immigration to Latin America, Presented by Atoma Batoma
4. Korean Migrants to Americas, Presented by Sanghun Cho
5. Asian Immigrants in Japan, Organized and/or Presented by Yoko Okunishi

Refreshments will be served!

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