

Session for the Society for Urban, National, and Transnational/Global Anthropology

106th Meeting - American Anthropological Association - Washington, DC - 28 NOV - 02 DEC 07

“Difference, (In)equality and Justice: Locating Personhood and Place in the Commodity Landscape”

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The conference theme inspires a session that considers how ideas/things that may be fundamental to construction of personhood and place, can be treated in economic, legal, or political terms, to become either commodified or, conversely, made inalienable. This session will explore the impact of invasive market forces on intertwined processes of person and place-making. Studies of physical displacement, which must address adjustment and change, have encouraged dynamic models of person-place bonds. The work of members in this session expands the concept of displacement. We go beyond what has been a nearly exclusive focus in the literature on *involuntary* disruption, resettlement, or loss of attachment, to include the alienation, uprootedness or sense of “dispossession” that seem to characterize contemporary life.

Understandings of identity based on a dynamic model of personhood in place recognize that self-identity and personhood constitute complex, ongoing, and negotiated processes within an environment that is both ideological and material, social and physical. This view addresses an important dialectic of change and constancy as well as the tension between a present, actual self and future, possible self. Here we should think broadly about the realization of human potential, sources of restriction on this realization, and ultimately address the question of “flourishing” or necessary conditions for the construction of undamaged personhood and experience of well-being.

Papers on both US and Latin American research will consider how the social, cultural and physical resources available for the projects of person and place-making are shifting within sweeping change brought by post-industrial economic restructuring, increasingly translocal market forces, and the advance of neoliberal ideals. We examine critical but vulnerable resources for person, self, and place-making through consideration of people in diverse situations who live and work at various socioeconomic levels and locations within the “flexible,” global economy of late-capitalism. We explore how this shifting landscape is shaped by politics of social and environmental justice and geographies of difference.

In a variety of ways, our work details how the production, circulation, and consumption of particular economic and legal hegemonies can affect the individual and social potential of human beings. We recognize that *the terms in which* human life is conceived matter to that life. What does it mean to experience oneself as commodity or “ignored cost?” If a discourse of fungibility becomes part of one’s own account of self, it threatens disorientation of self and distortion of personhood.

We will consider varied reactions to invasive market forces in the process of defining self through labor in a workplace increasingly reliant on commoditized notions of workers where individuals are required to think of themselves as disembedded skills or qualities offered in the marketplace rather than as complete and integral persons. We will also illustrate attempts to preserve elements of “local character,” expressions of place, as essential resources for self and personhood. Our common goal is to point to new ways of dealing conceptually and practically with the mutually implicating impact of profound structural and cultural changes felt by people and absorbed by places where they live, work, and search for meaning in a world where human actions are increasingly characterized as marketplace exchanges.

Session Members – Abstracts & Bios**BRIAN A. HOEY** (Marshall University)

TITLE: Character as Commodity: Persons and Places on the Market

ABSTRACT: While drawing on the literatures of moral theory and narrative interpretations of the construction of self together with those that speak to place-based, embodied identity, this paper will explore the impact of invasive market forces on intertwined processes of person, self, and place-making. It considers how resources for these projects have changed in the face of translocal market forces and neoliberal ideals. Despite numerous proclamations of an essential placelessness to contemporary American society, place continues to be a basic, if unacknowledged, part of the construction of the person. In fact, a variety of place-making practices are increasingly pursued as ways of negotiating growing tension between personal experience with material demands in pursuit of a livelihood in the “flexible,” post-industrial economy and prevailing cultural conventions for the good life. These personal acts become the basis for defining self-identity within sustainable, moral narratives essential to undamaged personhood. This paper will discuss how a *sense* of place, understood as manifest in personal attachment to real and imagined elements of particularity in place, which individuals recognize and understand as “local character,” may support people in their ability to form lasting autobiographical accounts, expressions of individual “character” critical to personhood. Examining the notion of “property for personhood,” particularly with reference to the category of “home,” this paper offers a way of interpreting meaningful connections or attachments between the character of local place and individual character in the conduct of everyday life.

BIO: Brian A. Hoey is an Associate Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Marshall University. He received his B.A. in Human Ecology from the College of the Atlantic and Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan. His dissertation research explored non-economic migration where downsized and downshifting corporate workers relocate as a means of "starting over" in geographic places they believe provide the necessary personal refuge to rethink work, family and personal obligations. In addition to a continuing interest in career change, personal identity and the moral meanings of work, Hoey has a longstanding interest in the anthropology of space and place and, in particular, therapeutic ideals attached to particular natural and built environments. He also conducts research in Indonesia where fieldwork in planned settlements of government sponsored migrants reveal the contested nature of constructing personally and culturally meaningful space within the process of community building. Hoey has published on these and other topics in the *American Ethnologist*, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, and *Ethnology*.

MELISSA S. FISHER (Georgetown University)

TITLE: Wall Street Women’s Legacies: The Making and Marketing of Women Leaders and Legends in High Finance

ABSTRACT: This paper explores how the first generation of Wall Street women are constructing genealogies of their present and legacies of their past, as they approach retirement. Specifically, drawing on archival research and fieldwork in the Financial Women’s Association of New York (FWA) a fifty year old organization, I address transformations in women’s representations of their communal history and place within NYC’s financial community during the past three decades. In particular, I trace the planning out, and cultural content and form, of a series of FWA anniversary events (1976-2006). Here I make sense of women’s reflective engagement with their past, present and future by drawing attention to the place of FWA celebrations, the memorabilia displayed, and the story-telling invoked at particular moments marked in time and space. The paper unravels a change in women’s practices at FWA Anniversary events starting around the turn of the millennium. On the one hand, it shows how they are moving away from a focus of reworking and retelling their collective legendary past. On the other hand, it illuminates how they are gravitating towards simultaneously “re-inventing” the next stage of their own individual projected paths post

working on Wall Street, as well as debating the communal legacy (as pioneering corporate leaders) they wish to “market” and leave to the women following behind them. I argue that these changes must be understood in relation to the women’s need to temporally and spatially anchor themselves, as well as their place in history, within an increasingly uncertain work-retirement environment.

BIO: Melissa Fisher is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Georgetown University. She is the co-editor of *Frontiers of Capital: Ethnographic Reflections on the New Economy* (2006). Her forthcoming book *Wall Street Women: Gender at Work in Financial America* examines the intersection of economic restructuring, corporate change, and the reformation of gender and class on Wall Street. In 2006 she was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Social and Management Studies at Lancaster University in the United Kingdom. She received a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from Columbia University, in 2003.

DENISE LAWRENCE-ZÚÑIGA (California State Polytechnic University, Pomona)

TITLE: Cosmologies of Bungalow Preservation: The Quest for Singular Identity.

ABSTRACT: Notoriously materialistic, Americans of late have invested vast resources, and found new meanings, in the domestic spaces they inhabit. This research explores the phenomenon of homeowner efforts aimed at restoring bungalow dwellings originally constructed in Southern Californian foothill communities during the first half of the 20th century. Although individuals, couples and families undertake renovations as a way to uncover and reveal “history” and secure a unique identity in an increasingly a-historical and placeless world, the incentives and rewards for doing so are ultimately social and political, as well as economic, and are collectively produced. Preservationists form neighborhood organizations, seek legislation to protect historic structures, and self-consciously aim to contribute to rebuilding neighborhoods beset by years of disinvestment. This investigation is informed by ideas of consumption in the production of preservationist identities and lifestyles. While consumption is often seen to be an escape from the public sphere, historic preservationists’ consumption patterns, which take on a “curatorial” emphasis, provide the discursive underpinnings, foundation and legitimacy empowering citizen participation in the public sphere of local level politics.

BIO: Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga, Professor of Architecture, was originally trained as a sociocultural anthropologist and has taught architecture students at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, since 1985. Her research has focused on the particular ways inhabitants engage the materiality of the home to construct identities and lifestyles, and to realize aspirations that connect them to others. Longitudinal research on rural residents’ home decoration and remodeling activities in southern Portugal revealed the long held desire to materially express aspirations of upward social mobility, but also a selective embrace of modernity. Recent research activities in southern California focus on historic preservation of bungalow dwellings and the aesthetic politics of exclusion that mobilize preservation homeowners to organize neighborhoods and demand attention from city hall. Lawrence-Zúñiga co-edited *House Life: Space, Place and Family in Europe* (1999) with Donna Birdwell-Pheasant; and with SETHA LOW is co-editor of *The Anthropology of Space and Place* (2003).

MONICA DeHART (University of Puget Sound)

TITLE: Whose "line" is it anyway? Walmart and the Production of New Ethnic Entrepreneurs

ABSTRACT: The Cooperation for Rural Development of the West (CDRO) is an indigenous organization based in the rural western highlands of Guatemala. It has gained notoriety both within Guatemala and among international donors for its innovative efforts to operationalize Maya culture as a tool for development. Most of those efforts have explicitly privileged indigenous knowledge and everyday community practices rather than cultural artifacts as the

source of development. Recently, however, CDRO signed a contract with Walmart to globally distribute an exclusive line of “spa” cosmetic products that CDRO communities have developed. What’s more, CDRO decided not to advertise these products as indigenous in origin or as part of an ethnic development initiative based on “market research” which demonstrated that the source of the product did not matter to the product’s prospective consumer base. What mattered, instead, were the particular organic properties the cosmetics were to embody and the way those properties spoke to specific consumer lifestyles. This paper explores CDRO’s trajectory to show how shifts in global neoliberal development rationalities have redefined the significance of ethnic difference for development. It asks how indigenous actors engage in and experience development strategies that actively elide the specificity of their cultural, geographic, and historical location in order to preserve the symbolic and material bases for that difference. In other words, the paper examines the changing understandings and practices of personhood and place displayed by the “ethnic entrepreneurs” as they are both made and erased in the production process.

BIO: Monica DeHart (PhD Stanford 2001) is an Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology in the Comparative Sociology Department at the University of Puget Sound. She is currently completing a book manuscript that examines the role of ethnic identity in redefining development within Guatemalan indigenous communities and transnational Latino diasporas. Her research focuses on the intersection between identity politics and neoliberal development, and is based on over a decade of ethnographic fieldwork in the rural highlands of Guatemala, as well as more recent work with Latino communities on the U.S. West Coast. Her work on these issues appears in *Anthropology News*, *Diaspora* (forthcoming 13:2), and the edited volume *Harvest of Violence Revisited* (W. Little and T. Smith, eds.).

MARY LORENA KENNY (Eastern Connecticut State University)

TITLE: Deeply Rooted in the Present: Heritage Tourism and Poverty Reduction in Brazilian Quilombos

ABSTRACT: This paper examines heritage tourism in Brazilian quilombos (settlements of descendents of fugitive slaves). Heritage-making takes place within shifts in public policy, identity politics, “resistance” to globalization, and the commodification and consumption of “authenticity.” I draw from field research in a quilombo in the sertão (backlands) of Brazil where heritage tourism has become a key aspect of the political economy, and is often the only resource available for addressing the vestiges of structural violence. I explore the ethnogenesis of a territorial-based quilombola identity the development of marketable “trade marks” of group identity. These processes provide critical insight into the association between “ethnodevelopment” and its economic benefits for the community.

BIO: Dr. Kenny is an associate professor of anthropology at Eastern Connecticut State University. She has written on street youth and child labor in Northeast Brazil, and memory and the politics of drought in the Brazilian sertão. In 2006 she was awarded a Rockefeller Humanities fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution, Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

JANET L. FINN (University of Montana)

DISCUSSANT

BIO: Janet Finn received her B.A. from The University of Montana. She earned her M.S.W. from Eastern Washington University and her Ph.D. in Social Work and Anthropology from the University of Michigan. Janet teaches courses in social work, women's studies and Latin American studies. Her interests are in the areas of community practice, gender, youth, international social work, and social work theory and history. Janet is engaged in ongoing community-based research in collaboration with local groups in Montana and Chile. These projects include a study of seven grassroots women's organizations, a popular history of La Victoria, a poor neighborhood of Santiago, Chile, and a

history of women's contributions to community building in Butte, Montana. Janet is the author of numerous articles in social work, anthropology, and women's studies and two books - *Tracing the Veins: Of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata* (1998) and *Just Practice: A Social Justice Approach to Social Work* (2003, co-authored with Maxine Jacobson). She has recently co-edited a book with Ellen Crain, entitled *Motherlode: Legacies of Women's Lives and Labors in Butte, Montana* (2005). Janet is committed to linking social work and social justice in her teaching, research, and practice. She is the Director of the MSW Program in the School of Social Work at The University of Montana. She loves the mountains and enjoys running, hiking, and skiing.

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