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Interconnected Anthropology: The End of the Lone Anthropologist

Session Sponsor: AAA Presidential Session

Organizer(s): MARCY HESSLING (Michigan State University)

Chair(s): KAREN NAKAMURA (Yale University)

10:15 AM: ALEKSANDRA BARTOSZKO (Oslo University College) -- Do They Have Any Choice? Distribution of Life Chances, Risk management and poverty in a Nicaraguan village

10:30 AM: HEATHERR YOCUM -- Climate Change, Communities, and Environmental Resources in Malawi

10:45 AM: ISABEL MONTEMAYOR (Michigan State University) -- Chicano Niños Living in Michoacan, Mexico: A transnational case of identity

11:00 AM: MARCY HESSLING (Michigan State University) -- Mapping Identities: Space, Place and the Migrant Anthropologist

11:15 AM: NICOLE TRUESDELL (Michigan State University) -- Changing "Britishness": Racial Identity and the Recreation of the Nation

1:30 AM: MEGAN BANNON -- Digital Anthropology – Applying Ethnographic Methods Online

11:45 AM: FREDY RODRIGUEZ MEJIA (Michigan State University) -- Non-Governmental Organizations and the Politization of Environmental Practices in Copán, Honduras

Session abstract:

Not too long ago the vision of a lone anthropologist embarking on a solitary year-long journey into the field was common. However, as that notion becomes more antiquated anthropology students are rethinking their place in the field and their relationships within the communities that they study. The new anthropology no longer revolves around a west-centered approach to studying other cultures and societies, but is rather global and interconnected. Through visual representations we are able to inform how anthropological interactions and studies are becoming more and more cross disciplinary in nature, contributing to a broad range of theoretical interpretations.

This presentation will bring together visual imagery and excerpts from fieldnotes as the presenters address questions of relativism, identity and publics for twenty-first century anthropology. Have fieldnotes and sketches been

replaced by blogging and digital cameras? Are informants now collaborators or even friends, and are they influencing anthropological research more evidently? Can we as anthropologists withhold critique while in the field, adding it in as a footnote in a future manuscript? Each of these questions also deals with issues of what public and what is private, as anthropology students share experiences, discuss theories and broaden social networks online.

Participants in this Pecha Kucha presentation include students and artists from Africa, Europe, Central America and North America. Pecha Kucha is a format that is increasingly popular around the world, with each presenter displaying 20 images for 20 seconds, for a total of 6 minutes and 40 seconds. This format allows for a greater number of participants and will be followed by a discussion with the audience led by the session chair.

Aleksandra Bartoszko - Do They Have Any Choice? Distribution of Life Chances, Risk management and poverty in a Nicaraguan village

Santiago is a small village in east Nicaragua. It is situated in the mountains, near an active volcano which is currently the world's strongest sources of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and contributes also large amounts of carbon and halogen gases to the atmosphere. Health reports state that both volcanic air pollution and lack of access to potable water are the most important causes of mortality in the region. I will illustrate how people cope with what is perceived as risks and if they are really ignoring the scientific expertises as the authorities stand. By using pictures from their daily activities I will show people's choices, priorities, and survival strategies in this seemingly lethal environment. This will lead to better understanding of the idea of "pragmatic acceptance" (Giddens) in a context of environmental and health hazards. My research suggests that both scientists and government are using the rhetoric of cultural relativism to justify their own actions and meaning about the local people. I will also use examples from my own experience with volcanic pollution to justify use of phenomenology as a methodological approach in anthropology and emphasize the importance that anthropologist's sensual experiences have in the process of understanding.

Fredy R. Rodriguez Mejia, Non-Governmental Organizations and the Politization of Environmental Practices in Copan, Honduras

Copán Ruinas, in Western Honduras, is a small town bordering Guatemala which is home to the well known Mayan archaeological site of Copán and also a place surrounded by several Ch'orti' Maya villages. Since the early 1990s, with the emergence of organized social movements in Honduras, indigenous

groups influenced by other national social movements became organized, established an indigenous council, and were able to successfully negotiate with the Honduran government the reclaiming of lands (not all of their land but some parcels). Becoming organized not only provided the Ch'orti' Maya with a name and a legal representative body to establish conversations and claims with the Honduran government, but it also allowed them to officially request and obtain help from transnational non-governmental organizations. Though initially most of the help the Ch'orti' Maya received revolved around organizational techniques to further structure the social movement and instill a sense of ethnic identity in its members, in recent years the Ch'orti' people have been approached predominantly by environmental non-governmental organizations, both local and international. This presentation documents some of the work that NGOs are conducting among different Ch'orti' Maya communities, how a "return" to ancient medicinal and consumption of plants is encouraged while simultaneously being reinforced, modified, and hybridized as "organic" and "sustainable" practices with the help of modern farming techniques, and how individuals' ethnic identity is being reinforced through the inculcation of environmental values that are strategically constructed using specific forms of discourse that emphasizes people's connections to their ancestors.