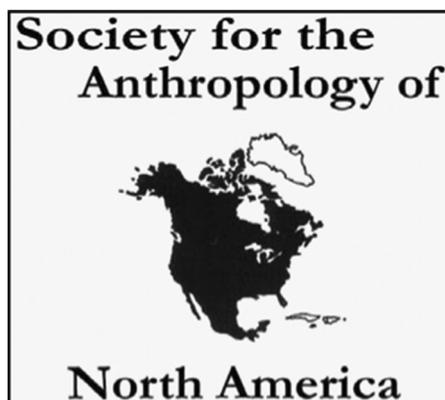


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Redefining the Family Post-Placement: Birthmothers and Kinship through the Adoption Lens

By Stephanie Harris

Twenty-three-year-old Kay reflects on the daughter that she placed for adoption at age 21: "She plays a big role in my life," she tells me. "She keeps me away from things that I never stayed away from, like drinking and drugs and smoking. I stay away from it now because of her. And I don't think about suicide hardly. She lets me live." Kay's connection with her child post-placement extends beyond psychological presence. She remains very close to her child's adoptive parents. "We are more like a family than an adoption," she says.

I spoke to Kay while conducting research as part of my Senior Project in Anthropology at Indiana University – Purdue University

Indianapolis (IUPUI). Through semi-structured ethnographic interviews completed in central Indiana, I examined how mothers regard the children they have relinquished for adoption and how this experience shapes their understandings of the way family and kinship structures can be transformed by adoptive relationships. My research questions focused primarily on birthmothers' (women who place a child or children for adoption) perceptions of the adoption process: Put simply, what happens to women's notions of kinship when they place a child for adoption? Post-placement, do birthmothers think of themselves and their adopted children as biologically related, or are these biological relations effectively severed when birthmothers no longer desire to or are no longer able to maintain a kinship bond with their adopted child? How, if at all, are birthmothers' notions of kinship extended to incorporate children who are no longer physically present?

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Studying kinship as seen through the adoption lens is a crucial perspective for anthropology. As Gershon (2003:439) recognizes,

In the 1960s, the descent versus alliance debate dominated kinship studies – anthropologists wanted to determine what relationship offered the best analytic lens for understanding how social groups were formed ... What would have happened in kinship studies if kinship theorists had taken a third relationship – adoption – as a starting point?

As Judith Modell's work recognizes (Modell 1986, 1994, 2002; Terrell and Modell 1994), the relationships created by adoption challenge the synonymy of biological relatedness and kinship often found in western societies, and birth parents' insights are valuable to understanding adoption relationships themselves. Very little research, however, has addressed the position of birthmothers with regard to kinship and their relationships with adoptive families post-placement. My project sought to document ethnographically the stories that birthmothers had to tell to capture the highly individual nature of their experiences as well as to understand what they make of their adoption experiences post-placement in both kinship and cultural terms. I pursued this subject from a birthmother's perspective, one that is easily overlooked and can often seem invisible.

Researchers (Chandra et al. 1999; Terrell and Modell 1994) often refer to the adoption triad, which consists of the adoptive parents, the birthparents, and the adoptee. While many studies of adoption (Barth 1994; Smith and Sherwen 1988) focus on the experience of adoptive families or adoptees or upon birthmothers' psychological responses to their adoption placements (Fravel et al. 2000; Haugaard et al. 2001; Henney et al. 2007), this project examines from an anthropological perspective the birthmother's side of the adoption triad and how women personify and understand birthmother roles. It is a meditation on birthmotherhood as it embodies a nontraditional mode of motherhood and examines kinship structures that are enacted through adoption relationships.

Adoption itself is a mechanism rooted in cultural, political, and personal meaning. As Edwards (1999) recognizes, a society's birth practices are intimately tied to its core cultural values. "There is no society," she writes, "in which births are the province only of the birthing mother" (Edwards 1999:388). Birth is also culturally patterned, Edwards (1999:388) recognizes: "There are cultural rules governing who should get pregnant, by whom, and under what conditions." As such, pregnancy is a highly transformative experience for women, regardless of its outcome. Birthmother testimonies can therefore serve as a lens refracting larger cultural trends with regard to birth, pregnancy, and adoption in the contemporary United States. My project uses the experiences of birthmothers to examine both how these women's views of kinship are transformed by placing a child for adoption and the larger cultural and political settings in which the adoption took place.

This study draws specifically upon semi-structured ethnographic interviews conducted and audio-recorded during March 2011 with three birthmothers living in central Indiana. Participating birthmothers ranged in age from 23 to 37 years at the time of the interviews and were ages 21-35 at the time of their adoption placements. They described themselves as white and middle to lower middle class. I also analyzed the writings of an 18-year-old birthmother who preferred not to submit to interview but who provided me with a link to a blog composed during her pregnancy and adoption placement. Data collected through interviews and written testimonies provide a portrait of each birthmother's life history and how their pregnancy and the subsequent adoption shaped that history; the analysis of transcribed interview data and blog postings that follows attempts to draw common themes from these birthmothers' testimonies and to synthesize their experiences to answer stated research questions as fully as possible.

A brief introduction follows of each of the women who participated in the study. Their names and the names of their children have been changed to allow them to remain anonymous.

Elle was 32 years of age at the time of her interview. She works as a freelance writer and hopes to self-publish a book of birthmother poetry. She is divorced and lives alone. Elle has a bachelor's degree and hopes to enroll in a graduate Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program in the future. She was age 30 at the time of conception and was 31 years old when she gave birth to her daughter, Julia, who she placed for adoption immediately after birth. Elle considers her adoption semi-open. She receives pictures from Julia's adoptive family "about every two months now," and she visits her daughter three to four times each year. Visits, she says, will be reevaluated at three-year intervals "as to whether or not they're healthy" for her, Julia, and Julia's adoptive family. "I've come to the conclusion," Elle says, "that I would like my daughter to see what I am like in a hard spot. Because it's a part of the truth. It's a part of why she has the parents she has."

Kay, previously mentioned, was 23 years of age at the time of her interview. She completed high school and is currently a sophomore in a social work program at a local community college. Kay hopes to work with birthmothers in the future. She is single, never married, and lives with her immediate family. She was 20 at the time of conception and was 21 years old when she gave birth to her daughter, Anna. Kay placed Anna for adoption immediately after birth. Kay describes her adoption as a "full-blown open" one. Her daughter even came to her home for Kay's most recent birthday. She receives letters and pictures frequently from Anna's adoptive family, and, before Anna's family moved out of state, visits took place every other month. Now, Kay uses Skype to keep in touch with Anna and her family, and they visit each other at least every six months.

Marie was 37 at the time of her interview. She is currently employed in data entry, works from home, and lives with her seven-year-old biological daughter, Jennie, whom she parents. Marie is divorced. She is also a sophomore in a social work degree program that she completes online. She was 34 when she conceived her son Andrew

and 35 when she placed Andrew for adoption immediately after his birth. Her relationship with Andrew's family is that of a semi-open adoption. It began as an open adoption, Marie explains, but underwent recent changes – the adoptive parents decided to stop visits after Marie saw Andrew four times in the last two and a half years, but she still receives letters and pictures multiple times per year.

Leah preferred not to submit to an interview but supplied a link to a blog written during her pregnancy and post-placement. She was 18 years old during the study and 17 at adoption placement. In her first entry, Leah gives voice to her plans for her child, writing, "[T]here is something so profound happening inside of me that it can only be described as a miracle ... Because even though this little one is not destined to be mine (s)he's still a miracle."

The project also contains an element of auto-ethnography; that is, my own experiences shape this inquiry and its subsequent analysis. I placed my daughter Isabella for adoption in 2008 when I was 18 years old. A birthmother myself, my own experience is in part what made this project possible in such a limited period of time. For Ellis and Bochner (2000:733), autoethnography is a strategy that "make[s] the researcher's own experience a topic of investigation in its own right." It is "an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis and Bochner 2000:739). Those who engage in autoethnography, they write, "ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become coparticipants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually" (Ellis and Bochner 2000:745). This is precisely what I hoped to achieve as I conducted my research and analyzed my findings. My coparticipants were birthmothers whom I met through agency-affiliated support groups after placing my daughter, and my own reflections and experiences helped to form the very questions I sought to answer in my inquiry. My vision for this ethnography is therefore a powerful one. By allowing my experience as a

birthmother to inform my work as a researcher, I am equally a participant and a voice in a domain where, as Clifford (1986:2) writes, "the poetic and the political are inseparable."

It is important to recognize that my position as a birthmother both constrained and aided me in completing my research. This, however, is the very nature of ethnographic work: Modan (2007:11) writes, "what you discover is necessarily refracted through the lens of who you are." Although she is studying gentrification in an urban neighborhood in Washington, DC, Modan's point remains quite salient. Modan (2007:15) adds that "social beings imbue the details of everyday life with immense cultural meaning." What cultural meanings I uncovered in looking at adoption may be vastly different from the sorts of meanings that a researcher without these prior connections and experiences might find. Modan (2007:10) cites sociolinguist Heidi Hamilton, who notes, "identity is intertextual, meaning that interlocutors (people talking to each other) draw on 'previous interactions in which language was used to construct particular identities for these individuals (or ones like them) in some relevant ways'."

Because my connection with the birthmothers I interviewed existed before the project began when we met in support group settings at a local adoption agency, these birthmothers may not have discussed information with me that they believed we both already knew or that had been discussed in one of our monthly support groups. For instance, they may have felt it unnecessary to emphasize or even convey the more difficult elements of our experience that we shared – the pain of saying goodbye to one's own child, for instance, or the feeling of excitement and even sheer bliss upon opening a letter full of photographs from our child's adoptive family. While, in many ways, my connections as a birthmother made it possible to access a network of birthmothers that are largely invisible to everyday society and to speak with them about their experiences, our friendships established post-placement through support networks may have

simultaneously inhibited the testimonies of those whom I interviewed and influenced my analysis of the interview data.

In orienting readers to the project, I find it necessary to ground it methodologically as ethnographic fieldwork and recognize the theoretical constraints that are particular to the work as a result. While these constraints are perhaps applicable to fieldwork as a whole, these considerations are included to emphasize their influence on the project itself as well as the limited scope of such a project. Recognizing both its strengths and its shortcomings and encouraging further or alternative interpretations of the data gathered are done in an attempt to preserve these birthmothers' testimonies against the weight of theory that threatens to confine what can be uncovered through ethnographic research. These accounts (and my presentation of these accounts) are by no means representative or intended to be representative of birthmothers as a whole. Yet, while it is difficult to provide a single perspective on adoption because the women who make adoption plans and the plans that they make vary so greatly, as do the contexts in which these women act, it is possible and absolutely necessary that, in the middle of such multiplicity, inquiries such as this one remain not without consequence. One *can* ask important questions about kinship as shaped by adoption, and, in the process, one can arrive perhaps not at succinct answers but at a new ground.

The project was limited geographically to central Indiana and subject to chronological confines: completed as a Senior Project to meet graduation requirements in the Department of Anthropology at IUPUI, it began in August 2010 and concluded in April 2011. Because the project required institutional review board approval in such a limited time frame, all mothers included in the study needed to be above the age of 18, and certain populations were not considered for the study. For example, many incarcerated women place children for adoption, and, as a protected population, these women were outside the scope of my project.

Above all, my findings emphasized that, in the United States, there is no learned societal role for "birthmother." Recognizes Fravel et al. (2000:431, emphasis added), "primary socialization for parenting assumes that children will be raised in the home into which they are born, and *there is no socially institutionalized role for the adopted child in the birthmother's life.*" Culturally speaking, roles like "mom," "dad," "brother," or "sister" are inherited on a large scale, but there are no overarching cultural models for whom birthmothers should be. To describe her role in her child's life, Kay has to turn to the word "birthmom." Elle tells me quite the same thing: " 'birthmother' is the only way that I can say it." *Birthmother*, therefore, is a word that women shape actively through their experiences. By embracing birthmotherhood, women position themselves not as a silent, invisible side to the adoption triad but active constructors of new models of kinship. They are women who embody roles that are not prescribed to them but instead determined by their choices and their ideas – in conjunction with those of the adoptive family and, in many cases, their adopted children – of what those relationships should be like.

In addressing the unwed teen mother as an icon of Christopher Jencks' "reproductive underclass," Williams (1994:350) "was struck both by how varied and nonarchetypical teen mothers are." In a similar fashion, as each of the women I interviewed mentioned, birthmothers are often powerfully and painfully stigmatized. They are not at all stereotypical teen mothers (if such a mother even exists); in fact, none of the mothers interviewed for this study were teenagers at the time of their adoption placement. Their experiences, while united by the power of adoption and the bonds it creates, are highly individual and understood by them in ways that vary greatly. The oral histories of birthmothers collected in this study aim to circumvent narratives that portray them archetypically. If one remains willing to grant power to adoption as a lens for examining kinship and sociocultural trends, the voices of birthmothers become vital to

understanding the structures and forces at work in their lives and the lives of those who take part in adoption relationships.

It is easy to see birthmothers in an alternate vein as well, simply as altruistic, self-sacrificing, Madonna-like victims of circumstance, but this dismisses them from the powerful social and cultural contexts in which they act. In making adoption plans for their children, they appear to be so “unlike” dominant western cultural models of motherhood. Birthmothers exist in a category outside traditional western notions of family structure and motherhood, one often overlooked and frequently misunderstood. Yet in embracing roles as birthmothers in the lives of their adopted children, women position themselves to actively shape kinship structures. Marie speaks to this directly, saying that she hates to be called a hero. She says, “Plain and simply, I’m a mom. I did what I thought was best for my child. That doesn’t make me a hero, that makes me a mom.”

It is crucial to recognize that the roles that birthmothers determine for themselves vary greatly. To assume that all birthmothers have similar relationships with their adoptive families or similar adoption experiences would be a mistake. Their dialogue reflects a consciousness of their unique roles and how they are implicit in their construction. They can clearly articulate what their roles are and what they want them to be as their children grow. Marie says of Andrew, “It’s kind of hard to define what I want to be in his life. I guess I’m still trying to define that. Now he’s just my son that I love and miss.” Yet she mentions the idea of a powerful friendship that could be possible between them: “You can’t be friends with your children. People tell you that all the time. But I can be friends with him. I want to be his friend because I’m not mom. Friend works.” Elle, in turn, talks about wanting to be considered a distant relative to her child’s family as she gets older, “where there is definitely the love and the kinship and the bonding and the sense of belonging with that person, but there isn’t a lot of contact and there isn’t a lot of necessary daily stuff.” She continues, telling me, “I want to leave things like

rules and the growing up issues to the adoptive parents because I trust them that much.”

These birthmothers recognize as well that adoption relationships are always evolving and not at all stagnant. Elle talks about her bipolar disorder and how she knows she could ask for more contact with her daughter but does not believe that she could handle more. Kay discusses how her daughter Anna’s family moved out of state, and now visits are less frequent, but they remain in touch in every way they can. For Marie, this realization came when Andrew’s adoptive family unexpectedly stopped their visits after they had fulfilled their contractual obligation with the agency for four visits within the first year. Andrew’s adoptive family’s view of their relationship with Marie emphasizes that they view the act of adopting a child as a substitute for becoming biological parents when, in reality, at least from the perspective of birthmothers, it is something very different. Adoption enacts a set of new relationships that are consciously shaped by all of the participants, including the birthmothers, in such an exchange.

We see through their testimonies that birthmothers do not “forget” their children but instead find themselves powerfully shaped by their adoption experiences. Fravel et al. (2000:431) examine what Reitz and Watson term the “‘happily-ever-after’ myth,” “the idea that birthmothers are somehow able to forget they bore a child, and ‘get on with’ their lives.” Something quite the opposite happens, however: “It is difficult to imagine,” they conclude, “that a woman could carry a child in her body for nine months and give birth to the child, carefully make a plan for the child’s future, then wipe that experience and person away and have no place for it in her heart and mind” (Fravel et al. 2000:431). Marie speaks to this directly: “I’m not the same woman I was before I got pregnant,” she says, and she mentions that she has finally found a reason to go back to school. She describes leaving her son in the neonatal intensive care unit when she left the hospital as “complete heart-break.” “I think I left a piece of my heart,” Marie says, “Because even though I knew I was going to

see him again, I knew I was never going to get to see him walk, watch him grow up in the normal sense of the word." Kay simply says, "I can't get rid of her!" and points to photos and albums all over her room. Elle echoes these claims rather intimately in her poem, "Frozen Toads":

*You want to go back and
Be like it was before
But you can't
Without being frozen
In moments*

Despite the pain, Elle tells me, she "could say goodbye to [her] daughter and not feel like [she] was giving her up."

In addition to being transformed personally by their experiences, these birthmothers' ideas of family were powerfully expanded through adoption. "It'd be weird if I didn't consider them family," Marie says of her child's adoptive parents, "I think part of me's always had a pretty open view of what a family is, but it's even more open now because family's not necessarily mom, dad, two point three kids ... there's more to family than just that nuclear base." Says Kay, "We just became one big family after everything we've gone through." Elle talks about blood being "thicker than water" before she got pregnant, of clinging to her immediate family. Now, she says, she looks at family in a different way. Elle says of her child, "She is my daughter, but she is their daughter too." Employing the metaphor of a village raising a child, Elle tells me, "that village doesn't have to be tied by blood or marriage or legal bounds. And when I expanded that thought into, 'Well, okay, how big is the village?' There is no boundary." Now, she says, she no longer even yearns for a nuclear family of her own.

As the nuclear family is transformed by adoption and as American kinship systems continue to be shaped by new models of family, birthmothers remain a critical piece of the puzzle. With no large-scale cultural role models to follow, birthmothers are active constructors of new roles for themselves in the lives of their children and their children's adoptive families, and these roles vary greatly among them. While literature has focused

primarily on adoptees and adoptive parents in understanding adoption, my experience led me to ask questions that pertain to birthmothers and how they are transformed personally by the adoption process as well as how they shape kinship models through their embodiment of such a role. Birthmothers exist in a category outside traditional western notions of family and motherhood, and understanding how their ideas of kinship are shaped by placing a child for adoption can move anthropological scholarship toward a greater understanding of how families are constructed and how family structures continue to undergo changes in the contemporary United States.

Acknowledgements

My undergraduate work in anthropology taught me, above all, that if one can answer a question simply and straightforwardly with little doubt or need for further reflection, the answer is probably wrong. Yet I have also learned to be bold, to have "the courage of my convictions," as my mentor throughout this project, Dr. Susan B. Hyatt of the IUPUI Department of Anthropology, has said. From her, I have learned that if one does not believe in ethnography, in the power of their methodology and in the insights that their informants can provide, then one can do little and cannot arrive at new ground. Put simply, if one does not even believe in doing ethnography, he or she will never be able to do it well. Completing this project has allowed me to have the courage of my convictions. In completing this project, I am indebted to Dr. Hyatt for her wisdom, continued support, and relentless encouragement. I am so grateful for her mentorship and her guidance throughout the project, as well as the careful editing and thoughtful discussion provided by friends and colleagues.

I also would not have been able to complete this project without the incredible and inspiring women who were willing to share their stories with me. It is my sincerest hope that I have both honored these women and represented them honestly in this document. I hope too that my work

and any continuations of it manage to speak to the power of adoption and the relationships that it creates (and continues to create) throughout one's lifetime. It is with the utmost gratitude that I would like to conclude this project, perhaps only temporarily.

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A Response to Cattellino Speaking of Secrets and Mischief

By David Lowry

The anthropology of "secrets": what would it entail? It must definitely entail a study of silences — *particular* silences. Michel Foucault (1990:27) writes about silence:

Silence itself — the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers — is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.

As the majority of anthropologists look to explain the institutions, structures, and ideologies that permeate our everyday lives, not much is said about secrets that permeate the “insider’s” perspective within any society, community, tribe, church, et cetera. Not much is said about how these secrets are often materialized through the absence of words – where words, explanations, conversations, and narratives are often needed and desired.

If there were a pioneer of the “anthropology of secrets,” it would probably be Zora Neale Hurston. She understood the “encounter” between anthropologist and “insider” all too well. When speaking about the African American community and the anthropologist, she articulates a very simple observation:

The Indian resists curiosity by a stony silence. The Negro offers a feather-bed. That is, we let the probe enter, but it never comes out. It gets smothered under a lot of laughter and pleasantries (Hurston 1990:2).

It is upon secrets that legends and conundrums are born. We do not know how “so and so” was murdered. The death becomes legend. As anthropologists, we are interested in what people *do and what they say*, but we must realize how people *often structure their lives* in relation to secrets – and the silences that mark them. Such keeping of secrets – or the presence of secrets for those who do not necessarily *keep* them – are copresent with many of the social structures that are more recognizable within everyday life (Figure 1).

At this, the 150-year anniversary of the U.S. Civil War, my great-great-great-great grandfather, Henry Berry Lowrie, a very important figure within the Lumbee Indian community of North Carolina, must be considered. His history is written within the context of revolting, rebelling, killing, confiscating, and many other pejorative actions that define civil war. He, at one time, had a bounty on his head that was larger than the one on the head of the legendary Jesse James. As the story goes, when told that he and other North Carolina Indians had to help rebuild Fort Fisher, toward the end of the U.S. Civil War, Henry fled. As a result, Confederate soldiers killed his father



Figure 1. This image is a photograph of Lumbee artist Gene Locklear’s “Visionaries from the Past”, and it is used with permission of the artist. The painting includes small sketches of important people in Lumbee past and present. A conversation with Gene Locklear (on 6/16/2011) revealed the artist’s intent for this to NOT be Henry Berry Lowrie. Locklear explained that the man in the center of the painting represents “Lumbee past and present.” Nevertheless, conversations with other Lumbee artists and community members, subsequent to my conversation with Mr. Locklear, substantiates my initial reading of this center figure as Henry Berry Lowrie. A sketch of Julian Pierce is in the lower left segment of the painting.

and other family members. But Henry swore revenge.

Henry was the prime perpetrator of many murders. He eventually disappeared. Many people assumed that he was dead. During my current research in the Lumbee community, I interviewed my uncle and father who told me that they grew up with Henry’s youngest daughter. They said, during this interview, that she and her mother (Henry’s wife) would make semiannual trips down to Alabama in the wake of Henry’s disappearance. “Now where would they have been going?” my uncle asked with a smirk.

"I don't know, but that's a big secret to keep!" I replied.

Like Henry, Julian Pierce, another Lumbee Indian hero that the Lumbee community holds dear, was defined within and by violence and the secrets that follow violence. Having served as an attorney, he was up for election for one of the judgeships in Robeson County, North Carolina (where most Lumbee people live). He was murdered just a short time before the election. His murder was always rumored as being linked with the secret and not-so-secret drug trade that emerged as a big business in 1980s Robeson County. Like Henry, there is mystery around Julian's demise and equally around his legacy. A local white leader supposedly killed him. Nobody proved it. It is hearsay. But the whole ordeal around his murder, to this day, as it is upheld by secrets that are possessed by some and coveted by others, helps illustrate the very vital ground between personal experiences as "insiders" and the structural, theoretical tapestry that we (anthropologists) tend to throw over such complicated, complex pasts and presents. It is not simply the settler state. It is not simply colonialism. It is not simply poverty. It is not simply racism. Secrets often hold within them the *magic* of the interweaving of all these elements.

Many people in the Lumbee community have asked, "What would have become of Julian?" Yes, what would have become of the Lumbee community if he had not died and assumed the judgeship with his undeniable charisma and willingness to take the Lumbee community into a brighter future? Some of us probably also wonder what would have happened if Henry Berry would have stuck around or not disappeared. I think both men – in their demise or disappearance – knew too much about too many mischievous things that were very lucrative within the underbelly of Robeson County, North Carolina, and the South: whether war or drugs. And the secrets of those individuals rooted deeply in the Lumbee community, who knew and know what happened to each of these heroes, who have suffered in silence,

burdened by this history of violence, serve as nuggets of truth that easily escape the anthropological gaze.

Following the 2010 plenary talk by Jessica Cattelino at the Society of the Anthropology of North America meeting, I must ask: what do secrets say about the condition of subaltern conditions within the United States? Cattelino (2011:1) explains that by focusing on "settler colonialism," we will be able to see how "forms of power ... organize American and American Indian lives in perhaps unexpected ways." However, I ask, in the contexts of secrets that speak to certain persons possessing the power of information, in ways that indicate "many silences" that are "distributed," where does the "settler state" exist? Might "the state" be alienated from the power of these secrets? And how much can the context of a socially contentious American past – which is epitomized by intra-national fissures like the U.S. Civil War – be credited for creating the spaces, places, and relationships within which these secrets remain vital? "Can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak 1988:283). Why, yes! But be aware that the subaltern may keep secrets – they may be subject to secrets beyond their control – that demand silence.

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Report from the Field

A Community Displaced: Cuban *Testigos* Creating Place in the American South

By Jenna E. Andrews-Swann

Dubbed “The City of Southern Living,” rural Moultrie, Georgia, is not the first place you would expect to find a sizeable community of political exiles and refugees. But Moultrie is a home to over 200 Cuban families that have fled religious persecution and tough economic conditions under Fidel Castro’s regime.

The first of these families arrived just a couple of decades ago, and more people from Cuba arrive each year, making this a relatively new exile community. Accordingly, a very small minority speak English, which restricts employment opportunities and creates a host of other resettlement challenges in areas such as home ownership, community-building, and involvement in children’s school activities. The picture is very different from those public and nostalgic (if stereotypical) scenes from Miami’s well-established Cuban community – elderly men in *guayaberas* playing dominoes and smoking cigars, *cafecito* stands at every corner, women strolling along *Calle Ocho* as the sounds of salsa music, and truncated Spanish waft out of storefronts.

I learned of this community from a colleague, and by way of a rather circuitous route, I had the pleasure of conducting research in Moultrie. Moultrie’s Cuban community represents an interesting subgroup of the Cuban diaspora. Nearly all are practicing *Testigos de Jehová* (Jehovah’s Witnesses). Castro’s history of prohibiting the public practice of religion and the fact that proselytizing is a central tenet of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ beliefs has meant that many have spent time in Cuban prisons before seeking asylum in the United States. The Hall is the center of cultural activity for most Cubans in Moultrie, and Cuban services are offered several times a week, supplemented by bible study in members’ homes.

The relatively small size of the community, combined with the rules of Jehovah’s Witnesses

and a recognized lack of public spaces to gather, has meant that, aside from Hall meetings, occasions for Cubans to come together to celebrate are few. Drinking and birthday celebrations are frowned upon for Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other ethnic groups in Moultrie have generally not been receptive to including Cubans in informal community events.

Creating Place in Transnational Landscapes

Rather than viewing nations as bounded, fixed entities, transnational perspectives instead consider the increasing flexibility of “nationhood” – national borders are no longer indicative of a homogenous people (Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Borders are figurative lines to be crossed in an effort to, say, earn more income or to gain a new degree of freedom. Border crossing does not rule out returning home or traveling on to another place; in fact, transnationalism facilitates this back and forth movement of people and ideas through porous boundaries. This transnational perspective in migration research highlights the simultaneity of change and continuity, and of rootedness and mobility that immigrants encounter, which, paradoxically, may have the effect of reducing the influence of the host nation-state on a given individual (Glick-Schiller et al. 1992). Rather than limiting the concepts of transnationality and diaspora as describing large-scale, global economic forces, fuzzier more nuanced perspectives remind us to recognize the role of human agency in (re)creating culture across different spaces (Ong 1999).

Theories of *place* help to conceptualize the ways that these spaces are transformed into meaningful sites. Places are created through sensory experiences and are characterized by their ability to gather and hold memory (Abercrombie 1998; Casey 1998). Charles Tilley (1994:15) notes that “geographical experience begins in places, reaches out to others through spaces, and creates landscapes or regions for human existence” (Escobar 2001). A place is not simply marked by a set of coordinates, rather, it is imbued with specific

meaning for the people that occupy it and thus is a potential source of identity and resistance (Basso 1996; Casey 1997). Places are not bounded areas, but open, with porous boundaries that allow a place to intermingle with its surroundings so that places and their identifying features are constantly reconstituted (Escobar 2001; Massey 1994).

Accordingly, some scholars have argued toward relationships between memory and place. Remembrance involves a degree of performance and ritual; the past is remembered, “conveyed and sustained” by performances, which may occur more strongly in and through places with familiar traits than foreign ones (Connerton 1989:40) – thus, the impetus for (re)creating a sense of place based on memories of home.

Gustavo Pérez Firmat, a prominent Cuban American scholar, alludes, rather poetically, to the intricacies and challenges of place-making in the context of migration: “You’re ‘cubanglo’, a word that has the advantage of imprecision, since one can’t tell where the ‘Cuban’ ends and the ‘Anglo’ begins. Having two cultures, you belong wholly to neither. You are both, you are neither: Cuba-no/America-no (Firmat 1994). There is something unique about Cuba, and Cuban Americans by extension, the exile community is so close to home but unable (or unwilling) to return. It is a tragic tale made even more romantic and appealing to mainstream America by the vibrant culture, sumptuous food and music, and mass-produced pictures of that handsome, mysterious fallen hero of the revolution, Che Guevara. The U.S. government and the media have been sympathetic as well, giving Cuban refugees special status since the 1959 revolution.

Why Moultrie?

The precise motivating factors for individual migrants from Cuba to the United States are immensely varied, even among the sample of people consulted as part of this research. Among those interviewed were people who accompanied parents to the United States as young children,

fled imprisonment (or the threat of imprisonment) for actions against the government, left for religious or ideological reasons, or came to the United States in search of better economic opportunities. One man in Moultrie simply claimed that he came to the United States “*porque tuve hambre*” (because I was hungry).

Some selected the United States rather than another country because of its purported freedoms, opportunities, and wealth, and because these traits are widely advertised along global channels. Others followed family members to the United States, who in turn followed routes often traveled between the two countries and drew on previously established social networks. Nearly all of these refugees left behind spouses or parents or children, often with the hope that once settled, they would try to sponsor (or “reclaim”) family members to join them in the United States.

Owing to the religious beliefs of the majority of Cubans in Moultrie, it is not surprising that many left the island to escape religious persecution. Edita,¹ who now occupies a trailer on the outskirts of Moultrie, noted that she was able to leave Cuba 15 years ago via “*la presa*” – that is, she received refugee status that allowed her to come to the United States legally – because she is a practicing Jehovah’s Witness whose religious freedoms were severely restricted under Castro’s government. Ester, a woman in her sixties who makes the best peanut candy I have tasted yet, pulled out a handful of documents and a photo to show me while she talked about her time in prison before coming to live in Moultrie. She lost her job as a teacher and she was jailed for carrying out her religious views and obligations.

Whatever their reason for leaving, well over a million Cubans now reside in the United States, and more arrive each year. The process of negotiating identity, of balancing one’s connection to a place left behind with one that serves as an

¹Names have been changed in accordance with Institutional Review Board-approved consent forms.

itinerant home, is an intricate one that exists in a borderland space. Firmat's (1994) metaphor of "life on the hyphen" speaks to the in-betweenness of this space. Still, even in that itinerant home, meaningless *space* is made into *place* embedded with new meanings that recall old memories and create a hybrid landscape. Cubans in the United States continue to re-create elements of home as they settle in Moultrie, creating landscapes that evoke the history and the cultures of individuals, families, neighborhoods, and countries.

The American South has not traditionally been a destination for immigrants. Before the 1970s, an overwhelming majority of incoming migrants to the United States settled around industrial centers in the north. Now, however, of the 1.2 million self-identified Cubans and Cuban Americans in the United States, at least 60 percent live in the greater Miami area, largely as a result of chain migration (Grenier and Pérez 2003; United States Census Bureau 2000). Another 12,500 Cuban immigrants have settled in Georgia, which is fast becoming one of the most popular secondary migration destinations for immigrants to the United States (Perry and Schachter 2003). Georgia is a popular alternative to Miami for many Cubans because of the lower cost of living and its slower, more tranquil atmosphere.

Colquitt County includes about 550 square miles of land and has a relatively low concentration of residents, only 76 per square mile (Miami boasts 1,158 people per square mile). Compared with those who settle in Miami or New York, Cuban immigrants in Moultrie are more commonly from rural regions of Cuba, *el campo*, and not from urban Havana. Moultrie is an attractive alternative to Miami because of the lower cost of living, the availability of low-skill agriculture and industry jobs, and a slower pace of life — what many called "*tranquilidad*" (Figure 1).

Tastes Like Homemade

Owing in part to their relatively small numbers and relatively recent arrival, members of the Cuban community in Moultrie tend to (re)create



Figure 1. Downtown Moultrie. Photo by Author.

elements of their home landscape in their new home landscape. That is, expressions of Cuban culture are largely limited to the private sphere and not often visible to other (non-Cuban) residents of Moultrie. Language barriers, religious beliefs, and cultural homogeneity further dissuade any attempts at more public, community Cuban landscapes.

Food is of primary importance in re-creating a sense of place in a less-than-hospitable setting such as this. In Moultrie, people even go so far as to place "orders" for Cuban food with friends who are traveling to Miami. *Cafecitos* are enjoyed not at window at the corner store but brewed in kitchens in Moultrie neighborhoods. The *cafetera* (stove-top coffeemaker) and tiny porcelain cups are a staple in these kitchens, along with a *tostonera* (wooden plantain press) and a deep fryer for making all kinds of delicious dishes. Food is also a relatively easy way to express and remember a sense of Cubanness: it is private, inoffensive, and it does not tend to draw attention from the rest of the community. The smells and textures of cooking and eating evoke happy memories of

Cuba and create a sense of community among those that share in them together.

Small gatherings in people's homes to play dominoes and to share Cuban food are common, but one celebration that draws everyone together, within the rules of Jehovah's Witnesses, is a baby shower. These events often include nearly one hundred guests and a vast array of traditional Cuban foods, music, dancing, and games that last well into the evening.

Another pleasant memory many Cuban exiles in Moultrie recall is a strong sense of neighborliness, open doors and windows, and a sense of safety and community. Most contend that these are not at all present in Moultrie. Whereas one might holler through the neighbor's window to gossip or to say hello in Cuba, the very nature of homes in Moultrie prevents this; glass windows and air conditioning create barriers to casual conversation between neighbors, and language barriers between recent immigrants and "native" Moultrians further complicate things. One popular anecdote was shared by way of example: a group of Cuban families decided to join together to share a meal. It was decided that the celebration would include a pig roast, a common custom for the Cubans in Moultrie, many of whom come from rural regions of the island. One of the men procured a pig from a local farmer, transported it to his house inside the city limits, and proceeded to slaughter it and to prepare it to be roasted. A suspicious neighbor noticed all the commotion and called the police, mistaking the pig for a large dog. When the police arrived, they followed the man around to his backyard to see that he was not, in fact, roasting a dog. They shared a laugh, and the police soon left. One interviewee explained the cultural confusion, noting that in Moultrie, that not everyone accepts having "a pig in the yard."

Quiet Connections

Events like the baby shower and Jehovah's Witness meetings factor prominently in the lives

of most Cubans living in Moultrie. It is a small community in a small, traditionally homogenous town, and the Cuban minority has overwhelmingly turned inward for support and a sense of belonging in the context of exile. Nonpublic places, like kitchens, homes, yards, and the Hall, are the settings for family and community interaction, in contrast to the large festivals and public parks and monuments that Miami Cubans incorporate into their place-making.

The meaning underlying these places and the ways they are utilized are impacted in interesting and diverse ways by individuals' experiences as members of the Cuban diaspora. For instance, the experiences of a recent exile differ from those of a person who arrived in the United States from Cuba as a young child in the 1960s, which may in turn differ from those of someone who traveled to the United States on a raft versus an airplane.

In many cases, the desire to maintain a particular connection with Cuba supersedes individual and community ideological arguments against Castro's policies and several barriers of governmental bureaucracy, along with the intricacies of navigating a life in the United States while maintaining these transnational connections. Thus, despite the challenges involved, people find a way to retain particular elements of their Cuban heritage and a relationship with their homeland.

The ways that places are created and lived in the United States are also influenced by individuals' experiences in Cuba. Many Cuban exiles in Moultrie arrived seeking religious asylum. Several people included in this sample, especially those aged 50 or above, even expressed concern at addressing questions concerning travel to Cuba or religion in general. There was also a noticeable difference in their reception of me, a researcher (read: white outsider working for a U.S. institution), as compared with interviewees in Miami who are part of a more powerful, well-established community.

Miami is a bustling international city, which is generally proud to display its Cuban

influences, and public cultural displays (e.g. festivals, monuments, and Spanish-language media) are common. Moultrie, on the other hand, scarcely notices its Cuban population, and Cuban immigrants are not especially eager to make themselves known, owing in part to their religious convictions and to the community's negative responses to other Spanish-speaking immigrants in the region. Instead, they quietly carry on, away from the prying eyes of vaguely suspicious locals.

This community represents but one example of the hybrid, border-straddling character of place-making that is certainly worth highlighting in this era of globalization. And as "the nation" increasingly exists apart from formal geopolitical borders, we need to view society itself as a transnational phenomenon (e.g. Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). On a similar note, if places, in both their physical and symbolic substance, reflect and influence human experience (Ingold 1993) and if that experience is increasingly transnational (Hannerz 1998; Vertovec 1999), then it stands that diasporic, transnational place-making will be an important, if fuzzy and nuanced, element of migration studies and investigations of place as we work to better understand contemporary patterns of human mobility around the globe.

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Book Review

- **Hannah Gill.** *The Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina: New Roots in the Old North State.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- **William Graves and Heather A. Smith, eds.** *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

Two recent scholarly works mark the conjunction of studies of emerging urbanism and changing social dynamics in the U.S. South. Hannah Gill's *The Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina* provides an ethnographic account for a popular audience of the ways Latina or Latino immigrants are entering the workforce, building communities, and becoming politically active in North Carolina. *Charlotte, NC*, an edited volume by William Graves and Heather Smith, gathers historical research, political science, geography, urban planning, and ethnography of the transition of Charlotte into a "globalizing" city (p. 1). Both works attempt to add depth and perspective to earlier scholarship (Murphy et al. 1999; Peacock et al. 2005; Smith and Furuseth 2006; Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2005) that has begun to document the tremendous changes accompanying globalization affecting the state, its localities, and the region. As such, both books should be classified as part of an emerging literature on the *Nuevo* South, cheekily named in reference to Latino immigration, which has begun to transform the racial, social, and demographic dynamics of the region.

Consciously or unconsciously, these contemporary authors also position themselves in relation to the brilliant literature on the (old) New South, exemplified by the scholarship of C. Vann Woodward and his students. For example, Gill begins with an account of the April 2006 walkout by Latino immigrants, the "Day without a Mexican," that was part labor action, part political rally. She then describes the fallout from repressive anti-immigrant policies, such as implementation of the 287(g) program, and reactionary

popular politics in rural Alamance County. In a chapter in *Charlotte, NC*, historian David Goldfield details the urban boosterism and friendly competition with Atlanta that has shaped the city's identity through the desires of its banking elites to manufacture skyscrapers, cultural institutions, and economic growth. Later chapters of *Charlotte, NC* reveal the economic circuits, social capital formations, role of state policies, and geographic forces present in the making of this place called Charlotte. Although separated by a century, one cannot help but think of the parallels with studies of racializing labor regimes in coal-producing Birmingham, Alabama (Stokes and Halpern 1994), Southern Populism's progressive and reactionary strains (Watson and Rebel 1938), and the contradictions of Henry Grady's Atlanta boosterism (Woodward 1971).

The Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina

Gill attempts to do several things at once: write a labor history of Latino immigration, situate contemporary immigrants' experiences in relation to past immigration to the region, outline the transnational aspects of immigrants' lives, analyze cultural performance and place-making, and document the political activism of Latina or Latino youth. She often provides rich ethnographic evidence, through biographical vignettes, personal observations, and direct quotes from immigrants, government officials, and native residents.

The breadth of her research is impressive, and it seemingly draws not just from direct ethnographic study but also from Gill's involvement with community organizations and policy discussions through her position at the University of North Carolina. Yet some of her analysis appears ambitious in relation to the short length of this volume and its marketing toward a non-academic audience waters down potential theoretical interventions. For example, the book lacks any exploration of local exigencies of labor history, in particular, the racial dynamics

between African Americans and Latinos, that course throughout Leon Fink's (2002) *The Maya of Morgantown*.

In Gill's analysis of Raleigh's annual *Fiesta del Pueblo*, she focuses on the importance of the festival as a community-building exercise, as a celebration of Latin American cultures, and as a place to dance and listen to music. She highlights the diversity of people present at this festival by providing four personal biographies of migration from individuals attending the festival. These biographies show not only the differences in background and life trajectory between men and women, indigenous and *mestizo*, legal and undocumented, Dominican and Mexican migrants to North Carolina but also some of the common threads tying this diverse group together, particularly family reunification as a pull factor and a tenuous economic situation in North Carolina.

While these personal stories are gripping, Gill leaves important questions up in air regarding the Latino cultural festival and its importance to her interlocutors. (How) is the *Fiesta* making Latino culture in North Carolina? Who gets to decide what cultural forms will be represented in the festival and how is Latino culture being codified? Of course, Latino culture is a nebulous term subject to much debate and interpretation (Dávila 2001; Delgado and Stefancic 1998; Oboler 2006; Stavans 1995). Gill does not attempt to move this debate forward; instead, she uses the terms Latino, Latin American, and Latin without problematizing this issue. While briefly acknowledging the festival organizers, a local nonprofit, she does not explore why certain bands, dance groups, and food vendors are featured in the event. Is festival going a cultural practice that originates in Latin America, in village celebrations, rodeos, or outdoor music concerts, or is it learned by migrants as they acculturate to American and Latino life in the United States? What role do corporate sponsors play in shaping the festival? Does the festival reinforce deleterious relationships, say, between hack immigration lawyers and desperate migrants-seeking papers, or soda companies and immigrant children struggling with

obesity and diabetes? By taking the Latino festival at face value, she misses a chance to pursue these questions that could give a more complex view of highly contested *Latinidad* than the view her readers, or the average festivalgoer gets.

Gill cannot be faulted for failing to foresee the demise of immigration reform legislation in 2010 (after the book was in print), but the lack of congressional action and a spate of state anti-immigrant laws certainly dampens the hopeful tone with which she discusses immigrant rights activism. One wonders what is next for the DREAM generation of young immigrant activists who starred in the marches and protests from 2006–10? One wishes for a more pointed analysis of how neoliberal notions of democracy frame immigrant activism, as Holland et al. (2007) describes regarding political participation in North Carolina.

Charlotte, NC

Charlotte, NC is an amalgam of different disciplinary frames, all focused on the "Queen City" and its recent transformation: from sleepy small city to banking capital, from decaying textile mill neighborhoods to gentrifying hotspots, from progressive school desegregation to reactionary resegregation, and from black and white southerners to northern transplants and Latino and Asian immigrants. This work should interest urban anthropologists, both for its multifaceted analysis of the "evolution" of Charlotte to what it is today and for its attention to the political economy of the city. Matthew Lassiter's chapter, "Searching for Respect," is a must read for researchers trying to understand how cities market themselves and the role of boosterism, Chambers of Commerce, and media portrayals on this process. William Graves and Jonathan Kozar argue that distinct structural, legal, and cultural factors led to the development of a Charlotte banking industry in the 1980s, while Heather Smith and Emily Livingstone detail the process of skyscraper building and gentrification that accompanied a campaign of "corporate

citizenship” by banks in the center city Charlotte. Scholars of race and racism will find several illuminating chapters, including a discussion of attempts to diversify the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, NASCAR’s fan base, historical accounts of African American neighborhoods, Stephen Samuel Smith’s thorough analysis of the shifting politics around public school desegregation, and Tom Hanchett’s documentation of immigrant residency patterns in Charlotte’s “Salad Bowl Suburbs.”

While these chapters demonstrate the depth of research that is currently being pursued in and about Charlotte, it is unfortunate, at least for those of us who cherish the rich knowledge gained through participant observation, that more ethnographic studies were not included in the volume. José Gámez’s “*Mi Reina: Latino Landscapes in the Queen City (Charlotte, NC)*” is the exception that proves the rule. Using the technique of urban *flaneur*, Gámez examines socio-spatial dynamics on a street corner in East Charlotte, revealing the “Latino landscape” hidden by landscapes of power and processes of making Latino immigrants socially invisible. For someone who lived and worked in the neighborhood Gámez describes, his descriptions are poignant and accurate, if constrained by the apparent short time he spent there. While Gámez gives us a dot on the map, one wonders how *Charlotte, NC* might be augmented by other ethnographic analyses of this city, say of the lives of middle-class African Americans returning south generations after the Great Migration, a “studying up” of the lives of financial managers in the city’s banking headquarters, or even a study of the kayakers, mountain bikers, and other outdoor enthusiasts that frequent the manufactured landscape of the U.S. National Whitewater Center (constructed for the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics).

Finally, these two books compliment each other on their strengths and faults. *Charlotte, NC* details the ups and downs of Charlotte’s banking industry, which could not be more relevant after the 2009 economic collapse while both books deepen our understanding of the social and political chal-

lenges of Latino immigration to the U.S. South. Unfortunately, *The Latino Migration Experience in North Carolina* spends little time focusing on the lives of Latino immigrants to Charlotte, a city whose Hispanic or Latino population numbered over 95,000 in the 2010 census. On the other hand, *Charlotte, NC*, by focusing on Charlotte as a self-contained entity, tends to neglect the ways Charlotte’s metropolitan statistical area retains its rural and small town connections through exurban development. Moreover, the Charlotte Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) straddles the North Carolina–South Carolina border; therefore its politics, economy, and culture should be considered part of both states. *Charlotte, NC* falls short of considering the relationship between the city and pockets of extreme poverty in the “trailer park” suburbs south of the city, or the resurgence of manufacturing in the Spartanburg–Greenville, South Carolina corridor. While advancing our knowledge of contemporary issues facing North Carolina, both works are less successful in advancing convincing theoretical frameworks through which to better analyze the complexity of the *Nuevo South*. Scholars would be best served to read both; together, they serve to bridge wide gaps in the literature.

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Overview

SANA's Invited Sessions at the 2011 American Anthropological Association's Annual Meeting "Traces, Tidemarks and Legacies" in Montreal, Canada

By Nathan Woods and Susan Falls

The great benefit, and privilege, of acting as session editor for SANA is the opportunity to share in a bird's eye peek at how anthropological research in North America is being cultivated. This year, we had a great variety of submissions that reflect the breadth and diversity of topics anthropologists are examining in the North American context. We also saw a strong sense of excitement and interest in North American schol-

arship, which translated into a number of exciting partnerships between SANA and other AAA Sections. Given these very positive outcomes, we thought that it is appropriate to give a short report on the consistent themes pointing toward thought-provoking developments both within SANA and cooperatively between SANA and the broader anthropological community.

One overriding theme that we saw in this year's submissions reflects the changing conditions for the production and circulation of knowledge. The changing political economy for the production of knowledge – both within academe and without – has enormous implications for not only how anthropological knowledge is produced and consumed but also how it is taught and circulated. These changes hold real entailments for how the labor conditions for academic and nonacademic knowledge work is currently structured, as well as for the types of professional and political responsibilities anthropologists inherit and are in positions to change, enact, and encourage. This theme is cogently highlighted in an invited session, cosponsored with the Council on Anthropology and Education; entitled *Collusion: Theorizing Academics, the University and the State*, this panel highlights the relationship between Neoliberal state policies and the conditions for academic labor.

As with the changes to the university system, the production and circulation of knowledge as it now occurs outside of the university, in government agencies, and nonprofits, through community sponsored research, local initiatives, and social movements, not only suggest changes in the market share for anthropological expertise but also means transformations in how communities stand in broader arenas of social and cultural debate. Two invited sessions stand out in this regard. First, *BioMexico: Risk Reproduction and Sovereignty*, cosponsored with the Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology, provides a range of perspectives on the emergent relations between bioscience and citizenship in Mexico. Similarly, *Gitxaala Laxyuup (Kitkatla Nation): Tracing Gitxaala History and Culture through Archaeology and Anthropology*, cospon-

sored with the Anthropology and Environment Section, presents a range of perspectives on the production of Gitxaala territorial history and on the production of knowledge as it is implicated in an array of disputes over ownership, territory, and sovereignty.

Papers in both *BioMexico* and *Gitxaala Laxyuup* address the long-standing issue of how real communities exercise political and ethical resources to intervene in the production of knowledge, and the circumstances for its dissemination, processes implicated in the everyday organization of health and environmental disparities, inequalities in gender and sexuality, and the ongoing organization of racial conflict and ethnic nationalism. While these two sessions complicate the issue of creating effective and equitable partnerships between anthropologists and the communities they study, they also speak to issues of collaboration and engagement with diverse forms of expertise. This is precisely what is in focus in the session, *Traces and Transformation in Anthropology and Art Practices: A Strategic Engagement?*, which SANA will cosponsor with the Society for Visual Anthropology. Here, papers examine how art practices might constitute a form of anthropological strategic engagement per se rather than something analytically appropriated by anthropologist, or as a practice viewed as mere collaboration between anthropological and artistic expertise.

Hopefully, these themes will offer the opportunity to engage with, and reflect on the changing conditions for the production of anthropological knowledge, and the diverse means, that in the North American context, anthropological expertise is challenged by the emerging conditions for the production, dissemination, and the use of knowledge.

Invited Sessions

- *BioMexico: Risk, Reproduction, and Sovereignty* (cosponsored with Society for Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology). John Hartigan is the organizer.

- *Collusion: Theorizing Academics, the University and the State* (cosponsored with Council on Anthropology and Education). Alexander Posecznick is the organizer.
- *Trances and Transformations in Anthropology and Art: A Strategic Engagement?* (cosponsored with Society for Visual Anthropology). Trudi L. Smith and Andrea N. Walsh are the coorganizers.
- *Gitxaala Laxyuup (Kitkatla Nation): History and Culture Through Archaeology and Anthropology* (cosponsored with Anthropology and Environment Section). Charles R. Menzies and Caroline F. Butler are the organizers.

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Thank You Catherine Kingfisher!

I will have to work extremely hard to fill the shoes left by Catherine Kingfisher, our outgoing North American Dialogue (NAD) editor. She successfully expanded the length and depth of NAD, making it a more relevant publication for SANA readership and beyond. I hope to continue pursuing the goals set forth by Kingfisher, such as pushing NAD towards becoming a larger, peer-reviewed journal, and fostering a continued presence by Canadian and Mexican scholars. I welcome your suggestions and contributions: I am especially interested in developing a visual column and in introducing emergent topics, concerns, and methods as they relate to North American Anthropology.

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Aims and Scope: North American Dialogue (NAD) is the newsletter of the Society for the Anthropology of North America. NAD provides a forum for North Americanist scholars, activists, and practitioners to share works-in-progress, to disclose findings, raise issues, describe fieldwork, and offer political and theoretical analysis as it is happening. Readers learn what their North Americanist colleagues are worrying about now and working on today.

NAD publishes two issues per year, in the spring and fall. Members of the Society for the Anthropology of North America receive NAD as a benefit of their membership. Please visit <http://sananet.org> to learn about becoming a member.

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