Anthropology in London Day

20 June 2011

Conference panel abstracts

Abstracts are listed in the order in which they will be presented in each panel. See the programme for further details. Plenary abstracts are appended in a separate document.

PANEL 1: SPACE, PLACE AND MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE

Fibrous Values: an ethnographic study on fiber ontologies
Annika Capelan (Lund)
How does fibre enact value? This study is an intervention into how knowledge domains are bounded and how knowledge flows, transfers, is figured and transforms. It is an ethnographic experimentation into, in the first place, the reconfiguration of 'knowledge economies' as 'fibrous value', and secondly, into how 'fibrous value' may be used to destabilize knowledge boundaries like 'artistic' or 'scientific' knowledge practice. This demands tracing the work of fiber and its 'value comparisons' through different situations. The study is based on extended fieldwork in Europe, Central and South America. Woollen fibre is followed as it moves, for instance, through the South American Pampas that nurture the sheep, inside the sample tube in the laboratory where the fibre’s quality is determined, and in a private art collection where it appears as a knitted work of art. Field notes are used as ‘snap-shot descriptions’ for the building up of an anthropological understanding. The study is aimed as a contribution to a discussion on how organic fluid ('natural') materialities might be used as methodological devices to trace how value ontologies are brought into being, co-exists, are maintained or wither away. It further aims to ethnographically flatten any hierarchical order of such co-present ontologies referred to a scientific or artistic which in turn host assumptions about natural-cultural relations.

A Trace of Gold: the ambiguous nature of abandoned goldmines
Peter Oakley (UCL)
Since antiquity, gold mining operations have imposed themselves upon and reshaped landscapes. Due to the boom and bust nature of gold rushes, entire mines, processing plants and communities have been deserted and left to the ravages of the elements. This paper addresses the range of material traces that remain from these abandoned enterprises and their paradoxical relationship to the landscapes and cultures in which they are sited. The paper will draw on examples from Alaska, California, Sweden and Wales to explore the contradictions inherent in these intriguing and ambiguous pieces of material culture. Originally integral material elements of an exploitative technological project that was imposed on the surrounding environment, these artefacts are now treated as conjoined with the land, being considered fundamental to the ‘spirit of place’. The paper will consider how the contradictions inherent in their existence play out; originally ignored or abused they are now treated by stewards as on the verge of dissolution and in need of conservation, though it is the durability of
these objects that has ensured their survival, and their dereliction that inspires adoration. The paper will also address how their subsequent stabilisation in ‘arrested decay’ and incorporation into stable and commercial heritage narratives has proved to be potentially corrosive to their role as active cultural icons that underpin regional and national mythologies.

The Pen and the Dart: dark arts of Amazonian lawfare
Harry Walker (LSE)
This paper examines the uses and values of writing among the Urarina of Peruvian Amazonia, considered as an increasingly important form of practical knowledge closely tied to transforming techniques of dispute resolution. It argues that the power attributed to written documents arises from their association, not with traditional graphic systems of design or inscription, but with local concepts of the speech act, as manifest in ideas of the authoritative voice. This helps to explain how and why the technologies of dark or retributive shamanism are gradually being superseded by mastery of the production of written documents, while retaining an emphasis on the displacement of voice and agency, the projection of objects from the self, and a careful cultivation of powerful allies. By tracing this new domain of knowledge to an emerging legal subjectivity and language ideology, the paper seeks to shed light on the nature and conceptual status of ‘justice’ in a perspectival cosmos.

Outside spaces: emigration, imagination and knowing the unknown in Morocco
Alice Elliot (UCL)
This paper explores how the unknown comes to be imagined and known. Based on extended fieldwork in a rural area of central Morocco where emigration to Italy and Spain is pervasive, the paper explores emigration and movement from the standpoint of those who neither migrate nor move. By tracing the complex interactions between ‘those who move’, the emigrants, and ‘those who sit’, the non-emigrants, it shows how emigrants coming and going from Europe become a technology for the imagination of Ibarra, ‘the outside’. The paper argues how, in this particular area of Morocco, outside spaces are a constant and imposing presence affecting and infecting people, things, kinship relations and the imagination.

PANEL 2: PERSONHOOD AND IDENTITY

A Problem of ‘Popular’ Knowledge. Invisible persons and cultural others
Narmala Halstead (UEL)
This paper explores how certain categories of knowledge may conflate in academic and non-academic settings as part of ready assumptions about those who are visible as ‘cultural others’. In settings, where cultural identities are also seen to produce positive others, these categories are overburdened and become embedded ways of knowing. This visibility can precipitate approaches based on understandings about complete and culturally-bounded identities which becomes a problem of ‘popular knowledge’. In various contexts, an ethnic or cultural identity is the foreground: this is a given focus that can preclude or subsume other aspects. In this paper, I consider how I initially came to focus on ethnic and cultural identities in my work as part of a socio-political and cultural setting inhabited by ‘cultural others’. I look at how this focus expanded to consider the non-ethnic within the same cultural groups and individual identity. I examine the literature, first, by looking at a deliberate absence of
ethnicity as remarkable in terms of the ways ‘ethnic lens’ can be the expected mode of seeing particular groups. I then consider research which places emphasis on the partiality of persons and the non-ethnic. I draw on this literature to discuss ethnographic accounts on Guyanese East Indians and their negotiations of identities through fixity, and cultural open-ness. I consider this open-ness not as a departure or an engagement with other groups, but as self-scrutiny of ‘completeness’ and an unveiling of the person who may be rendered invisible through the focus on the ethnic.

**Traditional Japanese Music in Germany**  
**Minori Suzuki (SOAS)**

My research seeks to provide an account of ‘how a traditional Japanese music of gagaku is disseminated, understood, valued and represented in Germany’. Gagaku is a type of court music and an oral tradition including songs and dance. It has been performed for the Japanese imperial family and both the religious ceremonies of Shinto and Buddhism since 7th century in Japan until today. By looking at a gagaku ensemble in Germany, I aim to understand the ways in which the traditional music is contextualized outside Japan by the performers and the teachers. In Japanese history, gagaku had never been a popular form of music and the musical skills and knowledge were exclusively passed down among gakke, chosen clans for gagaku performance, until the Meiji Restoration (A.D. 1868). After the restoration, gakke were ordered by the newly established Japanese state to present all of each clans’ exclusive musical knowledge and skills to the imperial household. Thereafter the music had become accessible to outside groups and consequently it was introduced to the West by western researchers. In 2000, over a century after the introduction to the West, the gagaku ensemble was established in Germany for the first time in Europe. What is significant about this research is that it is the first comprehensive ethnographic account of the dissemination of gagaku music. I aim to analyze how performers, teachers and other individuals involved in the musical activities conceive of and internalize this oral tradition in bringing it to the German public.

**Unity in Diversity: non-sectarian social movement challenges to the politics of ethnic antagonism in violently divided cities**  
**John Nagle (UEL)**

Divided cities are defined by a violent conflict of ethnonationalism and characterized by relatively permanent ethnic cleavages, high levels of endogamy and social segregation. Yet the perception that divided cities are wholly framed by the politics of ethnic homogeneity is challenged by a number of its citizens who refuse to be interminably circumscribed by ethnic politics. These actors can mobilize in social movements that promote non-sectarian politics and identities, and include the protests of environmentalists, trade unionists and the celebrations of gay groupings. This paper critically explores how such urban social movements may help ameliorate or contest the politics of ethnic antagonism in divided cities. It explores this issue in the context of debates regarding peacebuilding projects in divided cities, especially those that promote accommodative solutions to ethnic conflict, and how social movement mobilization may augment political power sharing. Focusing on non-sectarian social movement mobilization in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the paper critically analyses movements in three ways: creating intercommunal networks; fostering a public sphere of debate; and challenging the programmed uses of segregated space.
Being in the moment: ‘Gwongdong meidao’: in search of a Cantonese flavour
Willa Zhen (SOAS)
Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in cooking schools in Guangzhou, China during 2008-2009, this paper explores the idea of ‘taste’ and ‘flavour’ in local identity and discourse. Food has been written about as a symbol of place (Klein 2007; Trubek 2008; Adema 2009; Swislocki 2009). More precisely, specific flavours and tastes, have been tied to place. Using this connection between flavour, place, and identity, I ask, “What is a Cantonese flavour and why does it matter to local identity?” This paper attempts to ‘localise’ Cantonese cuisine, exploring local and shared understandings (and sometimes misunderstandings) of Cantonese cuisine as they are interpreted by cookery instructors and cookery schools. It is shaped against the framework of social change, as these meanings have shifted across time, space (intracity, across the province, and across China), and generation. It engages with the symbolic importance of a ‘Cantonese flavour’ as representative of the greater region. I suggest that the idea of Cantonese flavour is important as it shapes how cooking is taught – and performed – at cooking schools by instructors. It also sets expectations for how future cooks are expected to reproduce the cuisine for consumers of Cantonese food.

PANEL 3: EDUCATION AND LEARNING
‘Authoritative Uncertainty’ and ‘Coming to Know’: epistemological shifts in participatory research with Sudanese teachers
Paul Fean (Sussex)
This paper is based on ethnographic insights from cross-cultural participatory action research with teachers in Khartoum, Sudan, undertaken as fieldwork for doctoral studies from 2008 to 2009. Schooling and research offer potential means of analysing what forms of knowledge are valued, as both relate to its transmission and production. In this paper I contrast the views of curriculum knowledge held by the participating teachers with their process of learning by undertaking research in their schools and classrooms, followed by consideration of the implications of this analysis for academic research. The paper begins by briefly presenting the research context and design, which was influenced by postcolonial theorisation and drew extensively on ethnographic approaches. The paper then introduces the teachers’ views of knowledge as fixed and provided through the curriculum to be transmitted to learners. This is contrasted with the teachers’ learning by undertaking action research which facilitated their development of dispositions towards being mufetih (observant and analytical) and experimental. Thus, an epistemological shift occurred as the teachers constructed knowledge which was partial, contextualised and contingent. As research acts in a Foucauldian ‘regime of truth’ to legitimise knowledge, the teachers’ position can be conceived as ‘authoritative uncertainty’ through which further knowing can be constructed. In the post-fieldwork phase, I have taken a stance of ‘authoritative uncertainty’ and resisted offering closure by re-presenting research processes and outcomes as linear and certain. I conclude by reflexively applying this analysis to academic practices by proposing the value of poststructural engagement with messiness and uncertainty in undertaking and re-presenting research.

The Dangers of Being Known: bitching practices amongst girls in a North London secondary school
Sarah Winkler Reid (Brunel)
Bitching, “talking badly about someone behind their back” is an extremely common practice amongst peers within school, and is viewed by pupils as the ‘natural’ behaviour of girls. Any aspect of the person and their behaviour may be bitched about, from dirty fingernails, to personality, from outfit to how one talks to boys. While girls describe the pleasure of ‘being known’ by friends, bitching represents the perils of revelation, a constant reminder of the micro-surveillance they place each other under and the intimate ways they police and school each other in appropriate and acceptable forms of action and interaction. The personal nature of these practices make them a particularly effective, compelling and often painful form of peer interaction. Furthermore the covert nature of bitching makes it a strategic tool for girls, as the conventions of femininity in school prohibit overt displays of power and domination. Bitching enables girls to exert power, extend their intersubjective influence and hierarchically distinguish themselves from their friends, whilst overtly fulfilling the demands of feminine friendship. This paper considers bitching practices in the context of the co-created, interconnected conventions of femininity and friendship amongst peers in a North London secondary school.

Learning to be Loyal Sons: the demand for sacred knowledge and popularity of madrasa schooling in rural Bangladesh
Nurul Momen Bhuiyan (Brunel)
The focus of this paper is a religious institution (madrasa) that provides schooling exclusively on Islam and Islamic way of life in a rural Bangladeshi town. Central to this schooling are various forms of religious practices and performances, which also constitute the knowledge that Sunni branch of Islam consider as the core of their belief system. These practices and performances are reinforced and inculcated by the wider community of adults (parents, teachers) into learners by systematically addressing and synchronizing various qualities and expectations throughout the process. Loyalty is one such quality that both the protagonists of this schooling system as well as the wider society believe is infusible. Loyalty towards the moral and social order is thought by them to be a reflection of correct form of Islamic knowledge. Hence, in order to achieve such correct and fundamental knowledge on the Sunni Islamic way of life, they insist, one has to accustom one’s body and mind with the disciplining regime installed by their schooling system. In essence, in this paper I am suggesting that the knowledge base that constitutes this kind of madrasa schooling is not only about preserving the moral orders that Islam approves but also about redefining any social order according to Islam.

Under Construction: knowledge, social relations and the three sources of Islamic selfhood in Nampula city
Daria Trentini (SOAS)
In Nampula city, three differentiated ways of knowing Islam have originated multiple conceptions of Muslim identity. Firstly, spirit-healers (akulukhano) claim to have achieved knowledge of Islam through visions and dreams. Secondly, Islamic teachers (mwalimu) legitimize their Muslim identity on the basis of their Quranic Islamic learning (fakihi) and their esoteric knowledge (njulu) transmitted by a master. Finally, reformists aim at obtaining a ‘pure’ knowledge of Islam through a rationalist interpretation of the Qur’an and the Hadith. By considering these ethnographic data, this paper examines the place and the significance of practices and discourses of knowledge and the extent to which they produce specific notions of Islamic piety.
Through the exploration of some ethnographic cases I collected during one year of fieldwork in the city of Nampula, this paper looks at the ways in which these discourses of knowledge and understanding of Islam are socially constructed, practiced and consumed. As well, it attempts to illustrate the ways in which they dialogue, compete and influence each other. I will argue that these diverse ways of configuring Islamic knowledge can be taken as a mean to assess changing Islamic conceptions and shifting relations of power in the local Muslim community. I conclude that the focus on various ways of gaining Islamic knowledge and, the ways in which these intersect, may help to identify sites of potential fluidity, flexibility and innovation in a Muslim community shaped by the tensions between locally rooted religious practices and globally oriented Islamic movements.

PANEL 4: STATES, POWER AND CONTESTATION

Does the Political Bore? The denial and camouflaging of the ‘political’ in a Palestinian refugee camp
Luigi Achilli (SOAS)
Recent political turmoil in North Africa and Middle East has challenged much of the assumptions about the political passivity and inertia of ‘Arab masses’. If we want to take account of the political in a space like a Palestinian refugee camp, these events urge us to abandon reductionist models of the political which dominated much academic writing and adopt a broader conception of ‘political’. When I began my 15 months fieldwork in Jordan, I expected Palestinian refugee camps to be highly politicized. Except for occasional political demonstrations and events, neither the recent political turmoil in Gaza and West Bank, nor the constant footage of the Palestinian issue in the Arab media rouse refugees from the boredom and routine activities of daily life in Wihdat: a Palestinian refugee camp established in 1955, then on the outskirts of Amman, but now officially part of the city and that includes 51,000 registered refugees. Persuaded to document the significance of ‘the political’ in the everyday life of refugees, I was disappointed to observe a seemingly absence of it. Inevitably, this draws attention to how Palestinian political subjectivity and agency is articulated in the camp. What I came to realise is that in order to understand Palestinian political subjectivity in the refugee camps of Jordan, it is necessary to shift attention away from the classic parameters of political militancy towards under-represented spaces of refugee everyday life.

Language Analysis in the United Kingdom’s Refugee Status Determination System: seeing through policy claims about ‘expert’ knowledge
John Campbell (SOAS)
This paper examines claims made about the role of ‘expert knowledge’ in analyzing the language of individuals seeking asylum in the UK. I treat policy as a type of power and seek to understand how this policy narrative uses the language of science to further the British government’s stated interest to ensure ‘secure borders’ and provide a ‘safe haven’ for refugees. I look at the how the Home Office defines, shapes and implements the policy, and at how the policy has influenced judicial decisions. In short I unmask UKBAs claim to use expert, scientific knowledge in its assessment of asylum claims.

The Loss of Knowledge in the Face of Agricultural Intervention
Seamus Murphy (SOAS)
In the central, Peruvian region of Huanoco, agri-development organisations are asserting the need to change the way farmers produce potatoes. It is believed by the Peruvian government that greater integration into national and international markets through the introduction of market-oriented phenotypes and subsequent methods of production are an imperative for development initiatives in the context of national ‘food security’. This paper considers the impact that these development discourses and agendas have on the epistemologies and ontologies of Huanaco’s farming communities. It discusses the struggles that exist between traditional and modern frameworks of farming knowledge. Case studies reveal that traditional potato farming, which employs culturally influenced taxonomies and subjective terms of definition, differs from the universal classifications of modern agriculture. Drawing on works by Husserl and Baktin, consideration is given to the pervasive utterances of modern science and the ‘mathematisation of nature’ that modern agriculture involves. It discusses important changes in environmental cognition and the impact these changes may have on ontological understandings generally. Finally, it asks how such modern methods play a role in disembedding the actors, materials, or ideas from the context, and in turn, run the risk of undermining a causal relationship that provokes active response to ecological change.

Treating Women’s Problems. Competing biomedical models for an understanding of whether female circumcision is harmful
Sarah O’Neill (Goldsmiths)
In Fouta Toro (Senegal), girls are not excised during an initiation ceremony and there is no universally agreed upon procedure for the cutting or how to initiate the healing process. Excisers perform their trade in their own home according to the knowledge their mothers and grandmothers passed on to them. Most of them also provide other medical treatment depending on their family’s wealth of spiritual knowledge. After discussing what this ‘knowledge’ is, how it is generated, acquired and applied, this paper looks at how individuals engage with alternative biomedical models for reproductive health – such as ‘the white man’s medicine’ provided by statutory and non-governmental institutions. As excisers and midwives shift between ‘Western’ and ‘traditional’ explanations for reproductive health ‘problems’ I suggest that the former is not always the most convincing to professionals acquainted with both spheres of treatment. Although governmental and non-governmental incentives to stop excision through education programmes promote a ‘regime of knowledge’ with ‘scientific’ explanations for the ‘problems’ excision causes, this medical system runs alongside the ‘knowledge’ families say they have used to treat ‘women’s problems’ for generations. This paper explores how factors like pride in one’s lineage and the value of ‘knowledge’ passed down from ancestors affect reception of statutory biomedical models claiming that excision is harmful.

Cultural Knowledge and Conflicts of Interest: reading the constitution of Panapompom, Papua New Guinea
Will Rollason (Brunel)
For whom is culture a valuable form of knowledge? For anthropologists, culture has long been our most valuable asset. Anthropological theories of culture have allowed scholars in the discipline to make principled accounts of why and how people are different to one another without either essentialising difference or explaining it away as superficial. This has nowhere been more obvious than in the anthropology of
Melanesia, which has produced powerful developments in theories of cultural difference. For the subjects of anthropological discourse, however, the value of cultural knowledge is much less clear cut. Panapompom people from Papua New Guinea, like many of their countrymen, devalue their culture as backward, primitive, and antipathetic to the demands of development and law. These debates dominate political life and are crystallised in local readings of the constitution of PNG. This seems both to compel Panapompom people to retain their custom and to make it illegal – a predicament which echoes their ambivalence towards culture in general. This is an ethical as much as a theoretical problem: it introduces a conflict of interest at the heart of the anthropological project. We may value culture as our principle scholarly asset. They, on the other hand, regard culture as a liability to be liquidated. Where culture is involved in such an exploitative exchange, we must ask ourselves how we can proceed as investigators of difference on a basis more conducive to the production of shared value.

**PANEL 5: HISTORY AND MEMORY**

**Tenemos Nuestra Historia: a case of history objectified in a Bolivian Guaraní community**

Veronika Groke (St Andrews)

This paper focuses on the idea of ‘history’ as it is interpreted by the inhabitants of a south-eastern Bolivian Guaraní community. ‘Tenemos nuestra historia’ – ‘We have our history’ is a phrase people in my fieldwork community would commonly use to refer to a short printed document they kept which outlined the history of the comunidad. The document, authored by a non-Guaraní lawyer-come-historian from the nearest town, was originally drawn up to be used as evidence in a legal case the comunarios were involved in with a family of land owners at the time. It was clear that when people said that they ‘had their history’ this was to be taken quite literally: to have the document meant to ‘have’ the history, to be in charge of it and be able to use it should it become necessary. This conflation of ‘history’ with the physical object supposedly containing it throws up numerous questions about the production and use value of historical knowledge: who ‘makes history’ and for what purpose, and how is it used by those who do not? And what is the relation between history and ownership? By exploring these questions, I am hoping to show how ideas about history in my fieldwork community are inextricably linked with ideas about legitimacy, and what this link can tell us about Guaraní identity politics in general.

**Rowing and Sailing Perspectives of the Viking Ship Museum Roskilde**

César Enrique Giraldo Herrera (Aberdeen)

Seafaring has played a key role in the development of Nordic society, tainting it with a perspectivistic worldview in which skilfully made artefacts shape in the body cognition about society and the environment. The seafaring Vikings are one of Northern Europe’s main myths of origin, a widely acknowledged and profusely documented identity figure. Experimental archaeology has had an early and important development recreating its technologies, and makes continuous efforts to re-enact their use. Through embodied cognition, perspectivism and ecology of perception theories, and thick participation methodologies I address the way in which meaning and function of this know-how become entangled, tensed and worn at the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, elucidating some contemporary Nordic habits and worldviews. Rowing and sailing practices by Clubs associated with the Museum and the Maritime
School, a project aiming at reengaging problematic students, epitomize crucial features of the Nordic ethos and worldview, providing a glimpse into different possible Viking phenomenological scenarios. These practices illustrate Nordic notions and debates about community and individuality, and the ways they interrelate through know-how, property, social control and the development of common norms. Subtle style and organization differences like those between the hierarchical modern sport rowing vs. the egalitarian ‘living Faroese traditions’, not only imply different possibilities of perceptual involvement with the environment, but we argue, have implications for the conformation and reaffirmation of particular social structures, and perceptions of the past.

**Why There Is No Hesiod in the Papua Highlands: valuing difference in Fuyuge mythological knowledge**

*Eric Hirsch (Brunel)*

Father Paul Fastré founded the first mission among the Fuyuge people of the Papuan highlands in the early twentieth century. He spent twenty five years in Fuyuge lands and attempted to convert them to Roman Catholicism. In many respects, his efforts and those of his fellow missionaries were not successful. After he retired he returned to his old mission station and together with two local men (one being his early ‘convert’) produced a long discursive manuscript on Fuyuge ‘manners and customs’. His intention was to understand the Fuyuge perspective on the conventions and cosmology he observed. An epigraph at the start of his anthropologically valuable text indicates that the Fuyuge had no Hesiod to codify their myths and that they vary from one Fuyuge village to the next. This paper explores Fastré’s insight: Not only is there much variation in mythological knowledge between small linguistic and territorial groups, but even within them. I recognised this as well in my research over half a century later. The Fuyuge value these differences, but at the same time each place recognises their version as the correct one, the ‘straight’ one; but they are never entirely certain. What this highlights is that each Fuyuge place imagines itself as the cosmological centre of the world. Each Fuyuge group imagines this in a world of difference, where they believe that other Fuyuge groups, other Melanesians and white people (such as the missionaries) have a incorrect version.

**Prohibited Marriages and Psychological Essentialism: the case of the slave descendants in highland Madagascar**

*Denis Regnier (LSE)*

Starting with the particular case of the essentialized representations of 'clean' and 'unclean' people which make it difficult for free descendants to marry slave descendants in highland Madagascar, the paper will attempt to show how anthropological issues such as marriage avoidance can be fruitfully tackled by an ethnographic approach which is 'theoretically aware' of contemporary debates in cognitive science.

**Beyond Linear Time: pre-Soviet/Soviet/post-Soviet through ethnographic accounts from Kulob, southern Tajikistan**

*Diana Ibañez Tirado (SOAS)*

What initially attracted me to conduct ethnographic research on temporality in Central Asia was the possibility of gathering life-time narratives with people from different generations (pre-Soviet, Soviet, post-Soviet). Moreover, I wanted to do so in the homeland of the most powerful contemporary political alliance in Tajikistan: Kulob, a
town located southeast Tajikistan’s capital. Once there, I realised that many local people did not share the knowledge about their history and past that I had acquired through many years of reading history books. What is more, many did not frame themselves in relation to the historical periods frequently portrayed by scholars as being most salient in this world region, namely pre-Soviet/Soviet/post-Soviet. In my paper, I explore the consequences of taking-for-granted the “logical”, linear and teleological historical development that emerges out of an equally simplistic and binary division between “Soviet” and “Post/After-Soviet” in much scholarly writing and knowledge about Central Asia. I argue that by failing to challenge this historical framework and by further reinforcing it through naturalizing ‘1991’, or the end of the USSR, as an uncontested historical point of departure for Central Asian studies, we have ignored two important dimensions of people’s experiences of time and historical transformation in the region.

PANEL 6: ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Rethinking Our Findings and ‘Close’ Comparative Analysis: an example from Nicaragua
Mark Jamieson (UEL)
This paper is concerned with ‘causes’ and the promises and limitations of comparative analysis within anthropology. It challenges Mary Douglas’s famous assertion, that ‘The general proposition that an increase in witchcraft accusations occurs as a symptom of disorder and moral collapse was superbly untestable’, through the employment of ‘close’ comparative analysis of interesting differences in the tenor of sorcery accusations in two otherwise very similar Miskitu-speaking Amerindian communities in eastern Nicaragua. The implications of Douglas’s claim offer a serious challenge to a great many of the assertions that have become received wisdom in anthropology. This paper suggests one way by which anthropologists might meet it. It is argued in this paper that ‘close comparative analysis – in other words multi-sited comparative analysis between communities or groups where conditions (e.g. social morphologies, ecological circumstances, subsistence strategies, etc.) are very similar - allows us to consider marked differences and isolate the reasons for these without too much distracting ‘noise’ of the kind offered in cases where comparative analysis is undertaken between communities or groups that are very different in any number of ways, and where any number of ‘causes’ may be found for particularly kinds. ‘Close’ comparative methods offer anthropologists opportunities to abstract out a great deal of this distracting noise, allowing them at the same time to consider differences as ‘transformations’ of one another within more rigorous analytical frameworks, be they historical, functionalist, ecological or of other kinds.

Who Are We For Them? Theorising research-situated gender relations and data production
Shirin Saeidi (Cambridge)
Scholars have pointed out the importance of accounting for power dynamics during fieldwork due to fears that marginalised groups will be misrepresented by elite scholars (Harding, 1991, 1993; Routledge, 2002; Wolf, 1996). Additionally, studies have problematised the local positions of the native and non-native researcher, highlighted the temporal and spatial struggles that both these movements entail.
(Narayan, 1993), as well as the meanings of activism in the field (Maxey, 1999). Relying on Caplan's (1993) suggestion that we pay closer attention to how interviewees understand our identities, I argue that we can also politicise moments of exchange for empowering interviewees to offer culturally marginalised gender discourses (Naples, 2003; Presser, 2005). Drawing on extensive ethnographic research carried out in Iran and the European Diaspora from 2007-2010, this paper argues that the ways in which we position ourselves as researchers in the interviewing process can open up new sites for understanding gender relations within the social groups that we study, particularly when exploring topics that are difficult to access. Situations, ideas, sites, and sentiments that are hidden by locally appropriate and normative discoursing of the nation-state can be brought into view by politicising how our "multiple selfhoods" (Abu-Lughod, 1990) circulate within interviews.

**Return to the field: knowns and unknowns**
**Andrew Beatty (Brunel)**

In the Spring I made a return trip to two field locations in Indonesia: the island of Nias, which I hadn’t seen for 23 years, and Java, a dozen years after my last fieldwork. Big changes had occurred: an earthquake in Nias, rise of militant Islam in Java, the end of a dictatorship. But my concerns were local, and therefore personal. In Nias, I wanted to write a postscript to a long-completed fieldwork narrative: to find the “end” of the story, or at least my bit of it. What had become of the people, my "characters"? For Java, more scholarly questions: what had happened to the compromise between orthodoxy, animism, and pantheist mysticism that made it such a special place among Muslim nations? Had Java emerged from the shadow of puritanism that had fallen over it in the 1990s? There were short answers to these questions – some people had died, others migrated; some had converted, others – the mystics – had reverted to a kind of nativism. But the longer answers were more interesting. The significance of the bald facts depended on deep knowledge acquired over many years: on personal relationships spanning generations. The fieldworker is part of this picture, with perspectives quite different from the researcher fresh on the scene, and a very different impact. I was a visitation from another world and another time, the ghost of fieldwork past, a witness to things of which younger people knew nothing. How had knowledge changed in the generation since I had been there? What did they know that I didn’t, and what did I know that they didn’t? Does the look of the present modify, or merely complete, the past? Can we revise past accounts to acknowledge the emergent shape of the present? Does one return as Freeman to shred the earlier Mead?

**Anthropological Knowledge, Policy Making and Social Change: a comparison of Brazil, China and the UK**
**Petras Shelton-Zumpano (Xiamen)**

Anthropologists have thought about the connections between knowledge production, policy making and social change on both a theoretical and pragmatic level. A review of the literature on the anthropology of policy reveals that it is mainly a theoretical endeavour preoccupied with the hidden functions and ideological substratum of policy formulation. However, it has also mingled with applied anthropology and has served practical functions. The emergence of ethnographic research on policy has coincided with the return of applied anthropology to the forefront of the discipline in
the age of the global ecumene. Anthropologists are being called upon to not only interpret contemporary world politics of complex interdependence but also to help manage social change through increasingly inter- or multicultural forms of governance. Despite the enormous power that policy making has to trigger social change, it remains a marginal concern of the Anglo-Saxon anthropological tradition, in theory and practice. Anthropologists in the South tend to engage in policy advocacy and political action much more, fabricating cultures and building nations while they are at it. This is certainly the case in Brazil and China where anthropologists have established significant power relations with, for example, indigenous and minority group populations. A comparison to the UK of these two distant emerging countries, in terms of anthropology’s political dimensions and its effects on cultural schemas and social choice, can illuminate many of the ethical and practical dilemmas faced by the discipline when it chooses to apply the knowledge it produces.

The Ethnographic Flexibility: acquiring local knowledge and conventions during fieldwork
Brigida Marovelli (Brunel)
The aim of this paper is to explore the way local knowledge and conventions are acquired through fieldwork. Carrying out my research in Catania's open-air food market, La Pescheria, I have been embarking in a journey, which led me to play different roles within the market context. Since the very first stay in Catania until my last visit in 2010, I have been exposed to the local knowledge and performance, particularly in relation to food and Sicilian cuisine. This body of knowledge is highly evaluated at the market and it is acquired through the daily interactions between vendors and buyers, the market's significant Others. It was a direct result of my participant observation and it played a fundamental role in changing the way I perceived the market and the way I was perceived at the market. I had to learn the appropriate way of speaking, moving, smiling, communicating, a whole new behavioural code, which transformed me from a foreigner into an (almost) insider. This process was not based on speculation, rather on the bodily daily experience at the market. This paper will engage with the acquisition of the idiom of a Sicilian market, highlighting the empirical nature of this process and the importance of the ethnographer’s flexibility, in placing himself/herself in relation to the context.