Post-Quake Food Security in Haiti

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Society for the Anthropology of Europe

DEBORAH R ALTAMIRANO, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

2009 William A Douglass Prize in Europeanist Anthropology

This month, to recognize Ruth Mandel, recipient of the William A Douglass Prize, which is awarded annually by SAE for the best book published in Europeanist anthropology.

Migration, Citizenship and Belonging

By Ruth Mandel (U College London)

In the 1960s, Swiss writer Max Frisch observed that Germany, along with other Western European states, was experiencing a conundrum. A master of irony, he wrote, “We sent for workers, but people came instead” (Seiler 1965). The consequences of this conundrum are countless and the ways they have played out over the past several decades serve as underlying themes in my book, Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany (Duke 2008). In this book, I address alternative expressions of Islam, shifts in gender and generational relations, negotiating the homeland-diaspora consciousness and transmission, as well as the prorogative of nationhood by migrant elites.

Unlike many migration studies, my research took me back and forth between Turkey and Germany. I consider not only how the experience of being a migrant in each country contrasted sharply, but also how this experience affected the ethnographic process. In Turkey, I blended into the crowds, often passing for Turkish. In Germany, however, the invisibility I had come to rely on in Turkey became a marked visibility. I learned what it felt like to stand out unwittingly and to be the constant object of stares and disparaging assumptions.

In the course of carrying out my research I found that both historical disruptions and continuities in ways of thinking about Saloon others were central to understanding the present. Thus, in one chapter I describe what I call the German-Jewish-Turkish nexus and pose the question: Are Turks really Germany’s “new Jews” as many have claimed? Through a nuanced examination I try to dispel the more simplistic claims and presumptions that inform such critical questions.

The book engages other troubling issues as well; for example, why do the stereotypical headscarf worn by some Turkish women become fetishized by Germans in ways that Turks never could have predicted? I approach this by analyzing embodied and culturally embedded markers of difference. I also explore the curious role of language in the many monikers Turks and other foreign workers in Germany have assumed and been assigned over the last half-century of labor migration. Initially welcomed as “guest workers,” the bright expectations of this term began to diminish as the workers themselves felt they were embodying its Janus-faced implications. After all, who puts their “guests” to work? Forced to confront the prospect that these guests might not be returning, immigration officials shifted their expectations of the “host” society began to shift. During economic downturns, Turks and other foreigners became easy scapegoats for those Germans unwilling to address larger moral and structural issues. Though recruited as temporary economic buffers, this migrant population has reproduced itself along with the social, economic and political inequalities prevalent in Germany. The attitudes about Turks have proven extremely uncomfortable for a country that envisions itself as a quintessentially cosmopolitan, liberal and progressive society. The time has come to turn to a new, more inclusive society.

Post-Quake Food Security in Haiti

By John Mazzeo (DePaul U)

The Haiti earthquake and its aftermath had intense effects on the food security of rural populations located outside the January 2010 quake zone. More than 60% of Haiti’s population lives in rural areas and 80% of household livelihoods depend on the agricultural sector. Recent attention has focused on the food needs of people living in and around the Port-au-Prince epicenter. But there are several ways in which the quake can impact the food security of households situated far from the quake zone.

The immediate shock to food security is the increased cost of food, especially imported staples like rice, beans and cooking oil. The rise in prices comes in a context in which one out of five Haitians are food-insecure and over 25% of children under age five suffer chronic malnutrition. Malnutrition is a problem in parts of the country where food production is relatively high. The contradiction is because peasant households are not subsistence producers, much of which they grow is sold, not consumed. Imported commodities often make up the majority of food consumed. The destruction of Haiti’s main port and disruptions of the marketplace have led to rising prices of imported foods. At the end of January, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported a post-quake rise of 20% in the price of cooking oil, 28% in rice, and 14% in black beans in the Croix-des-Bossales market in Port-au-Prince. On the Haiti-Dominican Republic border, markets such as Dajabon have become important food sources. Observers there have reported significant increase in food purchases by Haitians following the quake.

The disruption of the Port-au-Prince market responsible for the resale of domestic produce will also have effects on rural households’ earnings from crop sales. Most farming households rely on intermediaries who buy produce from rural localities for resale in Port-au-Prince. Decline in purchases might mean lower income for growers. The price paid for export crops like coffee and cacao could also be hurt by damage in the port and the facilities of export.
companies. Recent reports by FAO describe markets in Port-au-Prince as “well-stocked and functioning,” yet the volume of food sales is not immediately clear.

The massive displacement of people from the quake zone, mostly to rural areas, will place significant burden on rural households and social-support networks. Many of these individuals originally settled to Port-au-Prince to escape rural poverty. The Haitian government estimates that over 340,000 individuals have been displaced by the quake, yet this figure reflects only those who used government transport. Compounding the burden, many households can no longer benefit from the remittances that these internally displaced individuals generated through work in Port-au-Prince’s mass informal economy. Labor sales are especially important source of income for poor households and those without access to farmland.

Overall, the quake’s destruction provides an opportunity to renew attention and support for initiatives that are focused on poverty-reduction through increased food production, food security and nutrition for all Haitians. Reconstruction efforts by the Haitian Government and international NGOs must account for the livelihood needs of rural populations in order to stem the flow of urban migration and the recent movement back to rural areas. This calls for projects that renew the natural environment, increase peasant productivity, and encourage grassroots social mobilization to support these objectives. A reconstruction effort that considers only Port-au-Prince will reinforce economic structures that have contributed to the acute-on-chronic suffering experienced in Haiti.

Please send your news and items of interest to Kenneth Maes, kmaes@emory.edu or Alyson Young, agyoung@sfu.ca. Visit the SAFN website at www.nutritionalanthro.org.

Society for the Anthropology of North America

DAVID KAMPER, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Circulating Knowledge and Heritage

By Sarah Quick (Wheaton U)

For the past several years I have been grappling with circulation as it relates to my research on how tourists experience performance. The theme for the 2010 AAA Annual Meeting is circulation; program organizers must realize “circulation” is a concept that can be applied to almost anything—the expressive, the material, the digital, the social—without affecting each other. But isn’t circulation’s resonance in its suggestion of movement the reason it’s so provocative? Circulation offers more than standard, stagnant categories that seem to limit and divide knowledge into separate entities. Speaking of knowledge flows, I recently received a Facebook message from a fiddler acquaintance who had just testified as an expert witness in a Métis harvesting case in Alberta. He asked if I could give a lawyer on the case a copy of my dissertation. Here I will briefly consider the ongoing dilemma of how anthropologists are engaged with the circulation of knowledge as it relates to what they study as well as what they produce.

My fieldwork focuses on music/dance forms (fiddling and jigging) as they represent Métis heritage as well as another factor, which for others I call Métis (and others) social solidarity. Although my field research was primarily based in Edmonton, Alberta and Saskatchewan, in addition to other Canadian provinces and US states, studying how this heritage circulates allowed me to expand beyond this physical coverage into the virtual world of Métis heritage performance. Since my last extended field stay in 2004, web coverage has grown exponentially through MySpace, YouTube, and other digital media. Mass media coverage has also expanded. For example, in the 2010 Olympics opening ceremonies Métis jigged into the stadium during the Aboriginal peoples’ welcome.

In my research analysis I use “regimes of value” (via Arjun Appadurai and Fred Myers) to consider the varying influences that circulate and structure the genres, performances and people I examine. I have focused on two converging and competing regimes, those that emphasize heritage ideals and those that emphasize commercial marketability. Heritage often emplaces an identity, which also for the genres I study equates to a particular sound (and way of moving) seen in opposition to other styles. Yet these stylistic distinctions also cater to the market; workshop and festival attendees need to know that one style is not the same as another, and that they have distinct choices as consumers. Contemporary Métis fiddlers who perform professionally or semi-professionally must balance their performances (live and recorded versions) with heritage and market consciousness. They must highlight the unique white while still sounding recognizable as fiddlers to mainstream ears. I also discuss many other “sites of experience” in order to compare live performances against recorded and digitally-accessed media, as well as to study the growing non-Aboriginal audience and performers finding resonance in Métis music/dance.

In the next phase of my research I would like to be able to assess how this heritage circulation, in its growing yet still quite diffuse spread, affects the powers that be. Is there a tipping point where such performative experiences, what UNESCO calls “intangible heritage,” can make a difference? Métis’ public visibility has obviously grown since their official recognition in Canada’s 1982 constitutional amendment. Here was a structural shift with lasting consequences: all references to Aboriginal peoples require at least the mention of Métis. These structures obviously affect how heritage is identified and how it then circulates, but can such circulation then further subvert other established structures? Looking at exhibitions like those at the Olympics, one sees little to enhance an appreciation of Métis struggles and history; rather, such official performances tend to obscure the complexity of what it means to be Métis. Perhaps this circulation of intangible heritage does make a difference, but I worry about its limitations. I’m concerned that my research, as a record of this heritage, may not prove an effective resource for the Métis in the contexts where they hope to use it (e.g., the court room). I characterized Métis identity as overlapping with other state-authorized indigenous identities, sometimes highlighting its nationalist overtones; I do not offer a straightforward story of longevity. My dilemma remains how to judge these varying and circulating representations, and my hope is that this year’s AAA meeting in New Orleans brings a continued dialogue over such matters.

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Society for the Anthropology of Religion

JENNIFER SELBY, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

SAR is pleased to announce the winner of the third annual Clifford Geertz Prize in the Anthropology of Religion: Richard Price’s Travels With Tooy: History, Memory, and the African American Imagination (2008). The society thanks the prize jury, Misty Bastian, Beth Conklin, Sue Kenyon, Aisha Khan, Stephan Palmiñi and Daniel Martin Varisco, as well as the prize coordinator, Andrew Buckner, for their careful reading and consideration. Richard Price’s acceptance response will follow in next month’s column.

2009 Clifford Geertz Prize

By Stephan Palmiñi (U Chicago)

This year’s Clifford Geertz Prize in the Anthropology of Religion was awarded to Richard Price for his monograph Travels With Tooy: History, Memory, and the African American Imagination. Needless to say, as a Caribbeanist, I was immensely pleased to see the prize go to one of the most distinguished scholars in this field. I am also aware of some slight impropriety in my presenting these remarks, since some of my praise for the outstanding achievement that Travels With Tooy represents can be readily found on the book’s back cover. But since I was not involved in selecting Travels With Tooy for the prize, I trust the readers of this column will forgive this minor breach of protocol.

So let me give you a sense of the excitement our jurors expressed for Travels With Tooy, and mix in some of my own thoughts. One of the jurors called it “a book that we’d be talking about, arguing about, marveling at in the coming years.” Based on more than four