

Elizabeth J Brummel, Anthropology

“Truth hurts n lies heal: Deception, identification and recognition”

This paper explores the relationship between deception and claims to particular modes of recognition among youth in urban Kenya. Deception can provide a path for circumventing structural circumstances that stymie the materialization and recognition of what some Kenyan youth understand as what they *ought* to be. I start with a case in which a young man, Hasan, tells his mistress that he has a child with his long-term girlfriend, however this is a lie. I suggest that analyzing this interaction as a simple matter of duplicity distracts us from understanding the attempts at social reorganization taking place within the interaction. When Hasan tells his mistress that he is a father, he is making a claim to be recognized in a particular way: as a father, and a father who would not desert his child's mother. What's more, as Hasan makes a claim to be recognized as such, he reconfigures the relationship between the mistress and himself as secondary vis-à-vis his long-term girlfriend and “their child.” While I make no claims that there is an ethics to this type of lying, I do suggest that Hasan's deception is a means of reconfiguring his social relationships and how he is recognized to conform not simply to his desires or aspirations, but with the way he understands they *ought* to be.

Filipe Calvão, Anthropology

“The Company's Oracle: Divination, Secrecy, and the Intimacy of Control”

This paper examines the bureaucratic and cultural labor of control and surveillance over people and objects in the history of Angolan diamond mining. I take on an event described in the security archives of Diamang, the colonial mining company, when the corporate police force recruited the assistance of African diviners to solve a case of missing diamonds. Other than the cultural significance of divination within the realm of corporate authority, this event invokes the complicated problem of technologies of truth detection as they pertain to diviners' techniques of social control and what historical sources identify as the “occult” forces of corporate surveillance. In his famous theory of moral accountability (1972), Max Gluckman contrasted a secular response to crisis in industrial firms with “magico-religious” approaches to “occult” causes of disorder. The history of Lunda's political economy of secrecy troubles this distinction and calls for a nuanced interpretation of how dynamics of openness and hiddenness, revelation and concealment, frame both divinatory knowledge and corporate surveillance. To that effect, I examine the occult beliefs of divination and the secrecy of corporate security as historically co-constituted categories of intimacy, kinship, and knowledge production. More broadly, I argue that an anthropological reading of criminality and law, capital and labor, should account for the ways in which seemingly opposite ideologies of secrecy and material realities of control can be dialogically constructed, intimately inhabited, and potentially displaced away from their strict coercive goals.

Lauren Coyle, Anthropology

“Sacrificial Laws of the Golden Lands: Fallen Chiefs, Artisanal Miners, and Authoritarian Echoes in Ghana”

This paper will engage theories of sovereignty, property, and sacrifice to analyze particularly searing conflicts and sovereign transformations that have arisen in relation to Ghana’s gold-mining industry – widely lauded as one of the pillars of the nation’s neoliberal economy and of its recognition as a “rule of law” success story for sub-Saharan Africa. The paper will draw upon ethnographic data collected in Obuasi, a key mining town that is home to both a century-old deep pit mine and a very controversial recent history of surface mining. Three specific domains will be analyzed as symptomatic of – and refracted through – the larger national constellation: (i) the historically violent clashes between the mine (and police/military) and the small-scale/artisanal miners who operate on its large concession; (ii) the more recent pacified “dialogue” and “informal agreements” that have been forged between the mine and the recently formalized “Central Committee,” which claims to rule over the estimated 20,000 artisanal miners in Obuasi; and (iii) cases of the dramatic falls of chiefs and attendant spiritual shifts in some of the most severely affected communities, especially those that lost vital farmlands and streams to surface mining and now tend to be heavily populated by artisanal miners.

Claudia Gastrow, Anthropology

“If Angola Were Libya”: Mobilizing Democracy In Luanda, Angola”

Since March 2007 small anti-regime protests have shaken Angola’s political sphere. Spread across the country, the protests have focused on a range of human rights issues and questioned the legitimacy of the ruling MPLA. The state media has responded by actively questioning mandate of the protestors. It portrays them as uninformed youth who threaten the hard won stability of this post-conflict polity.. In this paper, I ask to what extent the ability to claim democratic legitimacy can act as a basis to entrench political power or destabilise that power. Based on analyses of presidential speeches and state media pronouncements, as well as observations of anti-regime youth meetings and interviews with individuals involved in anti-government protests, I investigate how actors try to control the meaning of democracy and mobilise the connotations of democratic legitimacy to their own ends. In the process the paper seeks to undertake an anthropological analysis of the meaning of democracy, so as to understand its force as a political language and tool.

Matthew Knisley, Anthropology

“Map-Making and Metaphor in the Construction of Hadza and Sandawe Autochthony”

This paper considers the politics of representation manifested in the visual techniques of scholarly practice. Although focusing heavily on map-making - from geographic to genetic - this paper also draws upon photographic evidence and other modes of conveying visual imagery, such as certain narrative forms used by ethnographers and natural scientists. The Hadza and Sandawe of northern Tanzania are frequently described as enigmatic evolutionary holdovers capable of providing insight into Africa's, and humanity's, deep past. Whereas early accounts of the Hadza and Sandawe emphasized their ephemeral presence upon untamed landscapes, subsequent accounts have reinforced a notion that these groups are deeply embedded in place, having emerged *in situ*. A number of scholars have noted that visual representations of peoples falling under an expanding European purview had intimate connections with colonial imaginaries of space, time, nature, and power. By tracing shifts in such representations into the present-day, this paper investigates the contemporary resonance of and claims to "permanence."

Thomas Leavitt, Committee on International Relations (CIR)

“Humans Rights and Transnational Politics: Insights from Chicago's African Population”

The Western researcher who studies Africa rarely encounters a sense of irreconcilable difference with an “other” who embodies values antithetical to a Western, liberal consciousness. What's more likely is for the researcher to meet Africans who oppose the researcher's well-trained and principled respect for non-Western cultures and are likely to espouse the very ideas about modernity and the superiority of Europe and the US that many contemporary academics have long discarded and view as offensive. This paper, through oral histories and participant observations among the African population in Chicago, explores this problematic and interrogates the political subjectivities of Africans in that city, who exist in a transnational space and can't be located neatly in any spatially delimited polity or an empirical referent known as Africa. It explores how they understand transnational belonging in a global context informed by the human rights discourse exhibited by many African community organizations in Chicago. Ultimately, this paper seeks to advance a theory of human rights that recognizes the possibility of forming transnational solidarities without sacrificing democratic accountability not by examining any empirical entity known as Africa but by contributing to studies of the world from an African vantage point.

Kate McHarry

“I no longer see it’: Impermanent Materialities and the Politics and Pleasures of Fragility in Senegal”

If material things have social lives, as has been suggested, then their social deaths must also merit scholarly attention. This paper addresses Senegalese ideologies about the fragility of everyday objects and the moral valences of damage, loss, and decomposition. Based on 21 months of ethnographic research in rural southwest Senegal, I examine the dialectic between people’s perceptions about the qualities of mundane commodities and their expectations – and sometimes eager anticipation – that things will break, wear out, or disappear. Rather than view impermanent materialities as disruptive to the social webs within which they are entangled, I argue instead that the anticipation of decay is valued and seen as generative of moral members of the community.

George Paul Meiu, Anthropology

“The Money of Mombasa Doesn’t Last”: Contesting the Durability of Miraculous Wealth in Kenya’s Ethno-Erotic Economies

Throughout the past two decades, in the Samburu District of Kenya, people contested a new kind of wealth: luxurious houses and large hotels, cattle farms and foreign cars, bars, shops and motorbikes, all acquired overnight by men in intimate relationships with foreign women. Since in the 1980s, numerous young men facing the challenges of a declining pastoral economy, land privatization, and unemployment drew on colonial stereotypes of the primitive, exotic Samburu warrior (*morán*) to envision alternative livelihoods in tourism. They began migrating seasonally to the coastal resorts of Mombasa to dance for tourists and sell souvenirs. Many hoped to meet European women for transactional sex or marriages. I examine how money from foreign partners became a salient object of gossip in Samburu. Ethno-erotic economies, or sets exchanges based on the commodification of ethnic sexuality, offered young men new ways of imagining futures. But futures produced through ethno-erotic commodification were highly contested. “Money of Mombasa doesn’t last,” people explained, invoking the origin of this money in the morally corrupt pursuits of transactional sex and coastal sorcery. This paper examines how everyday practices of gossip constituted an intersubjective spacetime in which various actors negotiated the uncertain temporalities of wealth produced in tourism.

Erin Moore, Comparative Human Development

“The Anti-Politics of an Interminable Adolescence: Gender, Age, and Self-Shaming in Kampala”

This paper examines how feminine adolescence becomes permanent and politics becomes impossible at Uganda’s “International Day of the Girl Child” celebration. On October 11, 2012, 200 girls, flanked by police and photojournalists, marched through Kampala’s most manicured streets to the Imperial Royale Hotel, where they performed a series of skits, poems, and testimonials to an audience of government dignitaries and NGO officers. As conceived by the event organizers, these performances would lay claim to the need for improving rights protections for adolescent girls in Uganda. However, on stage, the performers cajoled their peers to abstain from sex for money, effectively shifting their narratives’ addressees from the institutional guarantors of human rights to girls themselves. In so doing, the young Day of the Girl performers superposed the perceived licentiousness of Ugandan women onto the notion of a naturally rebellious adolescence, entangling an unruly “adolescence” with “permanent” conditions of femininity and undermining young women’s call for services and representation in the ostensible venue where such political claims might be heard. Rather than an anomaly in contemporary NGO practices, I will demonstrate how these performances typify and dramatize the intersection of long-standing fears about female sexuality and the political capacity of youth.

Jay Schutte, Anthropology

“Sino-African ‘Cosmopolitans’ and the Chronotope of Aspirational History”

This paper concerns a community of Southern African students studying Chinese in Beijing and investigates the politics of translation at play in the acquisition of this language. The question as to how Chinese language learning is mediated through simultaneous discourses of Sino-African socio-economic transformations of an unprecedented scale – presently underway on the African continent – as well as legacies of prior colonialism that appear to resonate into the present, has thus far received little scholarly attention. In approaching this matter, I will argue, it is necessary to pay attention to the centrality of English – the initial, mutual register of commensuration between African students and Chinese teachers – as a prior ‘language of command’ (Cohn 1996). Emphasis on this key dynamic problematizes the understanding of Chinese education endeavors in Africa as being part of a broad-based project of mass-Sinofication with neocolonial characteristics, a trope emerging with increasing frequency in certain media discourses within the northern Anglosphere. Through close attention to both linguistic and metalinguistic practices involved in learning Chinese, the paper seeks to reflect how these students position themselves and others through language-based constructions of highly-temporalized internal and external boundaries or chronotopes, as well as through the ventriloquation (Bakhtin 1981) of archetypes of ideal personhood like that of the *Sino-African cosmopolitan*. An understanding of these complex processes will provide insight into transforming conceptions of socially-based identity and meaning/value formations which animate much of the economic and political discourse at play in the present China-Africa encounter.

Joshua Walker, Anthropology

“The Ends of Extraction: Diamond Mining After the Boom in DR Congo”

Recent literature on mining in Africa has focused on boom economies and the lifeworlds they enable. This paper examines the other side of the extractive lifecourse: a diamond mining town approaching a post-diamond age, but without a clear sense of its own future – or whether it has any future at all – without the “precious stone.” It addresses how people make viable lives in this context in Mbujimayi, a diamond mining company town in the Democratic Republic of Congo established during the colonial period whose extraction-dependent economy has declined over the past 10 years. At present, most deposits accessible to artisanal miners have been depleted, the parastatal mining company has not paid regular salaries for over two years, and massive erosions eat away at roads and private homes’ lots, leaving many city residents to dream of a future elsewhere. One informant put it thus: “We are living in a city that presents all the symptoms of a future ghost town.” The myth of permanence – of diamonds themselves, and of the paternalistic mining company – is gradually being brought to the fore. Yet the symbolic imaginary of diamonds as the only way to obtain wealth remains, and thus the artisanal mining economy continues.