

17. The Creolization of Identity and Personhood

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Recent discussions in social anthropology have focused on syncretism, hybridity and creolization in the remaking of identity and alterity under conditions of global transformations. Notions of and relations between place, culture and community were questioned and reformulated. But what is the impact of increasing translocal connections for the constitution of persons and bodies? How are new selves formed in interaction with different others?

This workshop attempts a comparative analysis of such processes by focussing on different socio-cultural conceptions of personhood and corporality. Beyond the modern ideal of a single individual identity, persons and bodies usually are conceptualized as a conglomerate of different (e.g. social, spiritual and physical) components, that relate identity not only to a specific social group but to multiple entities and agents in time and space. Can “creolization” contribute to the understanding of personhood? Are processes of creolization of identity just the effects of globalising conditions or are underlying pre-existing notions of multiple aspects of personhood shaping newly emerging forms of identity? Does globalization lead to the final victory of western notions of the self or will it provide unexpected venues for multiple and non-dualistic models of identity?

The Fragmented Self: On the Experience of Ethnography and the Politics of Culturism

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This paper is inspired by research in the Islamic world in the shadow of the War on Terror. It explores what potential there is in anthropology to counteract divisive culturist ideologies, and why this potential has not been harnessed until now.

Encounters between different cultures, values and ways of life have become a common occurrence in this era of globalization. Such encounters are not always experienced as pleasant by all parties. Associated resentments have allowed demagogues to raise support for violent political agendas on a basis of culturism. This cultural cousin of racism is becoming the idiom of choice for hate-propaganda worldwide.

I shall examine several psychological phenomena highlighting the challenges of ethnographic and similar experiences of culture-crossing, which I refer to as ‘cross-over effects’. These effects show that anthropologists and others in similar circumstances must allow a deep fragmentation of identity to occur within themselves. This becomes visible whenever we experience cross-overs between different cultural worlds. In my case, the added pressure of researching in a politically

fragmented world acted as a forced reminder of this cognitive fragmentation within. It is precisely the fear of such inner fragmentation, I shall argue, that is exploited by culturalist ideologies.

Authentic Autodenominations in Peruvian Amazonia: The Emergence of a Fusion Concept

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There has been a recent move towards the use of authentic autodenominations for indigenous people in Peruvian Amazonia and elsewhere. Examples would include Asháninka for the people formerly known as the Campa, or Yine for the Piro. On the face of it, such authentic autodenominations would seem to be the very opposite of creolization of identity and personhood, since they assert pure primordialist identities. The paper will argue that such authentic autodenominations are in fact complex fusion concepts generated in practical interactions between indigenous peoples and agents committed to the politics of representation (NGOs and the bodies that fund contemporary indigenous political movements). The concept of the fusion explores the possibility of refining the concept of creolization through the contrast between the forms of “world music” and “fusion” (as pioneered by Charles Mingus). While the former is a simple “mixture” of styles, the latter is a search for the form of a neighbouring style within the manifold immanent potentialities of a given local style.

Amazonian counter-voices and translations for modern-day use: monsters in the heart and stomach

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The argument here is that the ethnographic evidence strongly suggests that Amazonian peoples, as they become increasingly affected by a myriad of globalisation processes, are self-consciously creating a counter voice to the values of western individualism. A comparative review of the more recent ethnographic analyses of indigenous theories of personhood gives high credence to this observation. While it is true that the cosmological and shamanic backdrop to many indigenous understandings of selfhood have become hazy, obscured, or even lost, due to various disruptions, e.g. the zeal of Christian sects and westernised educational systems, there nevertheless remains a coherency to Amazonian notions of identity and personhood that, if anything, is being made more obvious to both insider and outsider.

This paper will suggest various recent and frequently encountered transformations in the indigenous expression of notions of self: 1) the indigenous connection of theories of selfhood (their own and others) with moral, social and political value is being made more explicit, 2) while there remains an adamant insistence within Amazonian theory of the constitutive nature of the cognitive, the affective and the material aspects of self, the theoretical elaborations of these connections are becoming more literal and condensed, with the forces of selfhood (positive and negative) being more concretised, or objectified, within the body, bounded, or centred in place, so to speak, 3) as a result, moral values, attitudes toward what it means *for indigenous people* to be socially responsible or irresponsible human beings within a community of beings,

can be formulated both politically and pedagogically in a more straightforward - and insistent - way.

Creolization and Diversification: Othering and nostrification in the transformation of personhood and identities among the Yukpa, Venezuela

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This paper demonstrates different levels in the current transformations of personhood and identity among the Carib-speaking Yukpa of North-Western Venezuela. Based on three different sites – a remote village, a mission station and Venezuela’s second largest city Maracaibo – contextually different strategies of othering and nostrification in the construction of personhood and identity will be examined. In each of these cases a twofold process in the construction of personhood and identity is identified that 1) adopts and “nostrificates” aspects of others and 2) re-constitutes and reaffirms notions of otherness. It will be demonstrated that these processes are not just contextually different but that the resulting construction of personhood and identity relies on different others and on distinct concepts of personhood. So while the common output in each of these cases could be called creolisation, these processes express and re-enforce multiple notions of identity and personhood which have so far hardly been analyzed as forms of differentiation in indigenous groups.

Coming of Age in Happy Valley-Goose Bay

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I use Connerton’s (1989) sense of ‘bodily’ memory to explore profound regional, community and personal change in the lives of three women. The 1941 construction of Goose Bay Air Base transformed Labrador society from a remote northern subsistence way of life to a centralised waged economy. Born in small coastal communities, the women moved to the nascent town of Happy Valley as children when their parents came in search of work. Their recollections of early town life are spliced with memories of their coastal lives, and illustrate the tremendous changes people experienced with the altered economy of the region. Their reminiscences are illuminating in several ways. Firstly the women passed through significant phases of their life cycle in consonance with the town’s development. Secondly their stories show how everyday habits and practises have woven the inland and coastal country of Labrador into the town’s social and physical fabric. Thirdly their narratives underpin a subtle gender bias between male practises of seasonal resource harvesting beyond the town, and women’s everyday habits of family and neighbourhood networking within the town. Finally, bodily memory combines s sense of historical involvement with geographical space through the inevitable maturation of the women and the town: coming of age in Happy Valley-Goose Bay meant the loss of a way of life now as unattainable as the women’s own distant childhood.

Learning to be a Beauty Queen for/of the Nation: Personhood, Modernity, and Creolization in Colombia

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In this paper I explore the intricate process of becoming a beauty queen in/for/of Colombia. The self-promoted image of a *mestiza* nation hampers the inclusion of diverse regions in a nationwide project as the National Beauty Pageant. On a personal level this means that the women participating in such contests have to learn to cope with its inherent contradictions.

Women from the capital (Bogotá) have to appropriate knowledge about folklore and traditions of the province they supposedly represent, whereas others still living in their home province must learn about style, modernity, and *urbanidad*. In both cases either modernity or traditionality becomes creolized on a personal level.

Special attention is paid to the pundits of the beauty business – mostly gay men - and the way this esoteric and exotic knowledge is passed on to the candidates of beauty pageants. I point out my claims about personhood, modernity, and creolization by examining the process of becoming a representative of Chocó, a remote province in the country's northwest, which is renowned for its Afro-Colombian population. This example highlights the stark contrast between the self-imposed ideal of a *mestiza* Nation and its province imagined as “black”.

