

## *Fall 2003 Newsletter*

### **Comments from the President Lillian Trager**

A few days ago, I received the most recent of the SEA volumes: *Plural Globalities in Multiple Localities*, edited by Martha W. Rees and Josephine Smart, and *Theory in Economic Anthropology*, edited by Jean Ensminger. Together with earlier volumes, such as *Economic Development*, edited by Jeffrey H. Cohen and Norbert Dannhaeuser, I am struck by both the range and relevance of these volumes, and of the SEA conferences on which they are based.

As the papers in these volumes make clear, economic anthropologists are exploring questions that not only have theoretical importance in the discipline but that also are central in understanding the economic lives of people around the world. Papers in the volume on theory range from Timothy Earle's discussion of the evolution of complex societies to studies of the informal economy and commodity chains in contemporary Africa.

Throughout all SEA discussions and debates, the central anthropological focus continues to be clear: we ask questions about individuals, households, and local communities, while also seeking to understand broad societal changes that affect them. People in many fields write about "globalization;" anthropologists, and especially economic anthropologists, are the ones who try to explain the intersection of global forces and local institutions, and how people both respond to and help shape what is happening to them. This concern with multiple economic processes that affect people in a wide variety of ways is reflected in many of the titles of recent SEA volumes and themes of SEA conferences.

I was privileged to be the organizer of the most recent SEA conference, on Migration and Economy. As always, we received far more interesting abstracts than could actually be included in the plenary sessions. There was, as usual, frustration at the lack of time for more debate and discussion of papers. The poster sessions have become a central part of SEA conferences, and we are all learning to succinctly display research results as we enjoy engaging in conversation with each other about our work.

For those who have not attended SEA conferences: they are not only the setting for lively intellectual debate; they are also convivial gatherings. In Monterrey, Mexico, where the Migration and Economy conference took place, the hosts at the Universidad de Monterrey organized entertainment during the banquet, and many participants enjoyed the music and dancing so much that they were reluctant to leave. One of the organizers, Breen Murray, also took those of us who could stay for an extra day on an excursion to see rock art in the desert outside Monterrey.

Next April, the conference will focus on food. Organized by Rick Wilk, it is scheduled for late April in Atlanta; more information is elsewhere in this newsletter. The 2005 conference will take place at Dartmouth University in New Hampshire. I hope all SEA members, and anyone else who is interested, will join us at the AAA. Details on time and

place of the business meeting and our invited session (based on the Migration conference) are elsewhere in the newsletter. Hope to see you in Chicago.

#### SEA and the AAA: Invited Session

The SEA will sponsor an Invited Session at the 102nd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association at the Chicago Hilton Towers, on Saturday, November 22, 2003, from 4:00 ? 5:45 p.m. in Conference Room 4A entitled: SOCIETY FOR ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY SESSION: MIGRATION AND ECONOMY.

The participants will be presenting the following papers:

- \* John Adams, University of South Carolina, KIN DENSITY, WEALTH, AND MIGRATION IN THE AMERICAN NORTH, 1860 TO 1870;
- \* Alice Kasakoff, University of South Carolina and Peter Finke, Max Planck Institute, THE KAZAKS RETURN "HOME": DIFFERENCES IN SOCIAL NORMS AND ECONOMIC ATTITUDES AMONG LOCALS AND IMMIGRANTS IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKSTAN;
- \* Lisa Cliggett, U of Kentucky, REMITTING THE GIFT: ZAMBIAN MOBILITY AND AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF MIGRATION STUDIES;
- \* Dolores Koenig, American University, MIGRATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN RURAL MALI: THE CASE OF KITA;
- \* Tamar Wilson, UM-St. Louis, THE EXPANSION OF IMMIGRANT NETWORKS AT ORIGIN: A CASE STUDY OF A RANCHO IN JALISCO (MEXICO);
- \* Ricardo Perez, Eastern Connecticut State University, UNBOUND HOUSEHOLDS: TRAJECTORIES OF LABOR, MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONAL LIVELIHOODS IN/FROM SOUTHERN PUERTO RICO;
- \* Lillian Trager, Univ of Wisconsin-Parkside, DISCUSSANT.

#### SEA and the AAA: Business Meeting

The Society for Economic Anthropology will hold its Business Meeting at the 102nd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, on Friday, November 21, 2003, from 6:15 - 7:30 p.m. at the Chicago Hilton Towers in Conference Room 4M. This is an opportunity for anyone attending the AAA to learn more about the SEA, exchange ideas, and make suggestions about possible future activities for the SEA. It is also an opportunity meet other people interested in economic anthropology and discuss the dozens of AAA panels this year addressing various aspects of economic anthropology. Please join us! We look forward to seeing you there.

#### **SEA Elections**

The results of the 2003 SEA elections were:

SEA President:

Lillian Trager (University of Wisconsin – Parkside)

**New SEA Board Members (until 2006):**

Georgia Fox (California State University – Chico)  
Lisa Cliggett (University of Kentucky)

*Congratulations!*

### **SEA Book Prize**

The first SEA Book Prize of \$500 will soon be awarded to a book in economic anthropology (broadly defined) published in 1999-2002. Subsequent awards will be made every two years. A three-person committee (Michael Chibnik – University of Iowa, Gracia Clark – Indiana University, Alan Smart – University of Calgary) is now busy looking at twenty books nominated for the award. The diversity and excellence of these books suggest that economic anthropology is thriving. The winner will be announced in November at the SEA business meeting during the 2003 American Anthropological Association convention in Chicago. For more information, contact Michael Chibnik, Chair, SEA Book Prize Committee, Department of Anthropology, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242 (michael-chibnik@uiowa.edu).

### **New NSF Funding Priority**

There is a new funding priority area at NSF that anthropologists should be aware of, although the final form does not exist yet. This current description is an incomplete draft for people's information.

#### **Human and Social Dynamics**

The twentieth century saw an unprecedented growth in our understanding of the physical and biological worlds. New technologies transformed everyday life and enabled the development of a more closely linked global economy. Our understanding of human and social functioning, however, has not kept pace. The arrival of the twenty-first century has brought with it new hopes and possibilities for better living, but also change, uncertainty and disruption. Advances in biotechnology may allow us to extend life and conquer dread diseases, but they also force us to reconsider basic questions about the nature of life and the ethical dimensions of research. Computer and communication technologies have created a wealth of new employment opportunities, and transformed many jobs so as to increase productivity, but they have also rendered large numbers of once vibrant jobs obsolete. Workplace rewards for education have increased dramatically, yet the country's educational system is not producing a workforce with the science, mathematics and technological skills needed to retain its leadership in the global marketplace.

Research into human and social phenomena is increasingly characterized by a focus on "dynamics", that is on how the behavior of individuals, formal and informal organizations, and societies evolves and changes over time. New methods, data and technologies have invigorated the social and behavioral sciences, as have findings in other disciplines. One result is that today the scientific understanding of the dynamics of individual behavior and social activity increasingly requires partnerships that span the scientific communities. For example the convergence of research in biology, engineering,

nanotechnology, information technology, and cognitive science is crucial for understanding the dynamics of mind, brain and behavior and also offers new possibilities for studying group and organizational behavior. Geographic information systems (GIS) and other technologies, together with mathematically rooted advances in multilevel modeling and network analysis, have opened new frontiers for understanding such diverse subjects as crime, environmental management, epidemics and patterns of linguistic behavior.

Social and knowledge systems do not develop independently. Humans develop new knowledge that leads to new technologies. Social institutions shape what knowledge is produced and determine how new products become part of everyday life. People and institutions respond to and are influenced by new knowledge and technologies. Understanding the human and social dynamics underlying these complex interdependencies is essential for our nation's continued progress. Multi-scaled, multi-disciplinary approaches, many of which have been made possible by recently acquired knowledge and new technologies, provide the tools and techniques needed to expand necessary understanding. A new NSF priority area, Human and Social Dynamics (HSD), will develop and apply these approaches.

**Long-term Goals:** In the FY2004 Budget Request to Congress the NSF emphasizes research and education related to Human and Social Dynamics. This priority area is intended to begin in FY2004 and continue for a period of five years. The intellectual goals of the effort are to:

Exploit the convergence in biology, engineering, information technology and cognition to advance our understanding of human behavior and performance at the individual, social, and population levels;

Refine our knowledge of decision-making, risk, and uncertainty, and to learn how to translate this knowledge into improved decision-making and risk communication;

Develop a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach to understanding human and social dynamics, incorporating international, regional, and cross-cultural approaches;

Create accessible large-scale data resources and advance methodological frontiers. Among the areas ripe for progress include but are not limited to agent-based modeling, complex network analysis, non-linear dynamics, computer-assisted qualitative analysis, multi-level, multi-scalar analysis and measurement research and technologies. Advances in these areas will provide the foundation for social and behavioral investigations for the next decade or more, and will create spillover effects that extend beyond the social sciences;

Develop the broad range of infrastructure needed to support transformative interdisciplinary research. Examples include collaboratory research networks, large-scale repositories and experimental laboratories, cognitive neuroimaging centers, national and

international topic-focused research sites, and innovative research platforms such as real and modeled virtual communities and intelligent environments.

**For more information, contact:**

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**Book Review**

[Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of brief reviews, comments or discussions about books relating to economic anthropology. We invite your reactions to this review and your suggestions and contributions of future reviews. Contact Kathleen Pickering at Kathleen.Pickering@colostate.edu]

In Amazonia, by Hugh Raffles (2002, Princeton).

Review by MATTHEW HOFFBERG, hoffbe@pacbell.net

Historical accounts of place-making can take a variety of forms, from cultural and political-economic analyses to environmental history studies of how ecosystems have unfolded over time. In his book, *In Amazonia*, Hugh Raffles has chosen to approach the Amazonian region by incorporating all of these perspectives as well as others in a pastiche that reflects the diverse and shifting fluvial landscape that captivates his curiosity. Writing with the descriptive flair of a novelist ("A Bend in the River," V.S. Naipaul's account of place-making in East Africa comes to mind), Raffles uncovers the ties between nature and human agency that bind the story of Amazonia's past.

Raffles is primarily concerned with exploring fundamental questions of place-making and nature-making, such as "What is Amazonia and Amazonian nature," and "how did this region and its natural environment come to be?" In answering these questions, Raffles peers through a post-structuralist lens, challenging the popular nature/culture binary and convincingly arguing that human agency has shaped the Amazon's natural environment just as the natural environment has shaped the cultures that inhabit the region. The simplest example that Raffles provides of this dialectic is the channel that was dug by the people of Igarapé Guariba to lengthen the Rio Guariba, the Amazonian tributary upon which the town was founded. While the channel significantly facilitated access to upstream natural resources, over time, channel digging drastically altered the water levels and shape of the river, wreaking havoc on the local ecology. (p. 71) Raffles uses these accounts of river dredging, as well as his observations of "varadouros" (canals that were cut to provide shortcuts along river bends), to effectively argue against environmentally deterministic notions commonly ascribed to the region (e.g. carrying capacity), showing how "the [varadouros] as a whole appeared to make a significant contribution to people's capacity to get by in this relatively resource-poor environment." (p. 32)

Maintaining the book's theme of place-making and nature-making, Raffles also examines the history of European exploration of the region, specifically focusing on the journeys made by Walter Raleigh in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and Bates in the mid-19th century. Lured by reputed claims that the Amazonian region of Guiana was marked by an "absence of prior possession and presence of wealth beyond measure" (p.79), Raleigh's imperial exploration nevertheless failed to realize the promised treasures. Raffles contends that Raleigh's visits to the area, along with those of other European explorers, helped fuel the popular belief that Amazonia contains valuable resources to be plundered and that local inhabitants are ill-equipped to use these resources effectively. This discourse, Raffles suggests, provided "an invitation that will echo down the centuries: a land poor in people but rich in resources; a land of indolence awaiting only industry; a pristine landscape on which the marks of culture are rendered invisible, invalid, unproductive." (p. 95)

Critical to Raffles' perspective on the nature of place-making is his belief that "places are never stable, and space is never empty. Both are always active, always being made, always in process and in practice." (p. 183) He contends that attempts to define a place or nature often remove the subject from the natural and social forces that keep places and nature from reaching stasis. Raffles writes that Amazonia is not a "natural landscape" in the traditional sense; rather, Amazonia is made up of several "natures" that are "dynamic and heterogeneous, formed again and again from presences that are cultural, historical, biological, geographical, political, physical, aesthetic, and social." (p. 7) Emphasizing the region's elusiveness, Raffles uses the accounts of European explorations of the Amazon to show how the region defied early attempts at appropriation, not to mention understanding, by Northern imperialists, specifically mentioning that "their [European] science turns out to be a hindrance, trapping them into thinking they were prepared, that they could conquer uncertainty through method." (p. 85)

To solve his paradoxical quest to portray a region that risks being oversimplified by static definitions, Raffles calls upon a wide array of approaches familiar to political ecologists. Drawing from political economy, he shows how the credit system of aviamento and its corresponding social relations have influenced patterns of resource extraction in Igarapé Guariba, the river town in the lower Amazon where Raffles focuses much of his research. He also examines historical accounts to demonstrate the perennially transformative nature of place, chronicling not only the European imperialist explorations but also retelling local histories of inter-family contestation over property rights. Using linguistic analysis, Raffles further uncovers details of human manipulation of the environment by exposing the rich vocabulary used to describe various waterways. (p. 27) Thus, it is through the juxtaposition of uni-disciplinary approaches to studying place that Raffles attempts to portray a whole that is more compelling than what these individual perspectives might provide alone. (p. 42)

Throughout the book, Raffles also intertwines several themes that have framed recent work in political ecology (see McCarthy 2002; Bryant 1998). Whether he's describing conservation efforts and trade of mahogany in South Pará or recounting the history of

Igarapé Guariba's founding family, Raffles' analytical prism tends to reflect in multiple dimensions. To take the former as an example, Raffles is equally fascinated by the "impure" scientific methodology applied to conservation research studies in the field, by the livelihood struggles of the local research assistants themselves, and by the images of colonial conquest that have historically been harnessed to fuel mahogany demand in the North (p. 163). When describing how caboclos, forced from their land due to enclosures, relocated to new houses built upon materials they brought with them from Igarapé Guariba, he challenges traditional notions of place, noting that "locality resides in people rather than in economy or geography." (p. 55) He also alludes to post-structural concepts on the formation of knowledge (Demeritt 1998), arguing that knowledge of the Amazon was shaped by an amalgam of factors unrelated to "pure science" itself. For instance, Bates' study of butterfly and plant species in the region was partially bounded by the customs of the local population. Raffles remarks that "if the plant [was] not significant to Amazonians there at that moment, it might well not appear in the record." (p. 144)

Readers looking for a geographically broader portrait of Amazonia's diverse landscape may be disappointed to find that Raffles focuses solely on the lower Amazon regions, and less than a handful of these locales in particular. Given that Raffles does not substantiate his arguments with references to other Amazonian regions, one is left wondering how unique are the culture/nature relationships depicted in Igarapé Guariba relative to other areas in Amazonia, or to river communities elsewhere in the world. Raffles also never explains the logic for singling out the two European explorer accounts that form the basis of Chapters 4 and 5. Why did he choose to focus on these failed British attempts at imperialism over the more lasting incursions of the Portuguese? On a practical note, the reader is advised to have a decent atlas at hand; the paltry map provided in the beginning of the book, despite a legend note to the contrary, fails to indicate numerous place names mentioned in Raffles' descriptions.

Overall, Raffles has provided us with a beautifully written case study of place- and nature-making. His intimate, descriptive writing style engages us emotionally as well as intellectually, adding a personal dimension that invites the reader to share his passion for uncovering the region's hidden meanings. Drawing on interviews, informal conversations, personal observation, historical documents, ecological data, linguistic analysis, and even aesthetic accounts (e.g. Bachelard), Raffles has infused the field of political ecology with an eclectic historical account of place that broadens our understanding of the complex relationships between nature and human agency.

## **REFERENCES**

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- Demeritt, D., 1998. Science, Social Constructivism, & Nature. In *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millennium*, edited by B. Braun & N. Castree.
- McCarthy, James, 2002. First World Political Ecology: Lessons from the Wise Use Movement. *Environment and Planning A* 34(7):1281-1302.

## **Review of Radical Political Economies**

SEA member Tamar Diana Wilson (University of Missouri, St. Louis) suggests that readers consider submitting manuscripts to the Review of Radical Political Economies. Articles in this journal, as the name suggests, often are critiques of neoliberal and structural adjustment policies and use Marxist or neoMarxist approaches. If you are interested in publishing in this journal, submit three copies of a manuscript to Helen Dayton Gunn, Managing Editor, Review of Radical Political Economies, Department of City and Regional Planning, 106 W. Sibley Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853. Ms. Gunn can be reached by email at [hg18@cornell.edu](mailto:hg18@cornell.edu).