

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

Guttman Community College

2011

Extraction from Immersion

Kristina Baines

CUNY Guttman Community College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/nc_pubs/107

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Extraction from Immersion

★★★★☆ 4

Kristina Baines
Guest Contributor

This month's "Notes from the Field" comes to you from guest contributor, Kristina Baines.



A local bush food, ch'i kaai flower buds, fried and ready to eat in the month of August, while Tuli looks on hopefully. Photo courtesy of Kristina Baines

As I begin the last weeks of my dissertation fieldwork, the preferred topic of conversation during my final encounters is my imminent departure. Thanks to my (extensive) anthropological training, I felt well prepared to enter my study community and immerse myself in a version of the tried and tested ethnographic methodology, however, I never gave much thought to the idea that the time and care spent entering would or should be mirrored in the leaving process. Again, as a practitioner of this traditional methodology, I figured I would always come back. Forever. The members of my study community, however, are eager for more details than "I will always come" and it has become clear that my extraction is requiring as much emotional honesty and practical finesse as my immersion.

While my field experience, immersed in a Mopan Maya subsistence farming community in southern Belize, has certainly borne some hallmarks of the ethnographers of yore, in reality I have spent the better part of this past year about an hour's drive from a cold soda and an internet connection. Keeping this tangible link to life beyond my firehearth may have served to make departing easier. Instead, my easy access to information, coupled with my passable tortilla making skills, has made me an asset to community members. I have a clear role in the community beyond "anthropological researcher." I am "helping" as well as "learning." This reciprocal arrangement works well in this community where traditional Maya practices of work exchange or "helping each other" are the norm and wage labor is much less common. It is this system, and my interest in the connection between these traditional work practices and the wellness of community members, that has strengthened my bonds.

Coming from an applied Anthropology department, many of my colleagues with interests also falling under the "Medical Anthropology" moniker are



Keeping this tangible link to life beyond my firehearth may have served to make departing easier. Instead, my easy access to information, coupled with my passable tortilla making skills, has made me an asset to community members. I have a clear role in the community beyond "anthropological researcher." I am "helping" as well as "learning."

To search, type and hit enter

ABOUT AN

AN Home
Meeting Calendar
Announcements
Association Business
Contributing Editors and Columnists
Editorial Office
Featured Posts
Past Issues

EYE ON DEADLINES

Proposals due March 15 for AAA Annual Meeting Section Invited Sessions and Public Policy Forums

Nominations due March 15 for AAA Awards: Mead, Leadership Mentoring

Proposals due April 15 for AAA Annual Meeting Sessions, Individual Paper and Poster Presentations and Special Events

Call for Papers for AAA Annual Meeting in San Francisco, Nov 14-18, 2012

Rules for Participation for 2012 AAA Annual Meeting

Nominations due June 1 for AAA Awards: Kimball, Schneider

FROM THE CAREER CENTER

Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Brown U

Assistant Professor of Linguistic Anthropology at UNC Charlotte

Resident Lecturer in Environmental Policy & Socioeconomic Values at The School for Field Studies in the Turks & Caicos Islands

ANNOUNCEMENTS

AN Seeks Proposals on Olympics
The widely-anticipated Olympics will next take place this summer in London. With this international event on...[More](#)

American Anthropological Association Position on Dissemination of Research
The AAA's role is to be vigilant when it comes to proposed legislation that aims to...[More](#)

able to successfully and elegantly address their research questions without the traditional, year long ethnographic immersion. For me, in order to really understand how bodies change in response to traditional environmental practice, I needed to spend many days carrying wash to the creek and depriving myself of sleep making tortillas late into the evening during planting season. Those nights at 1:00am, when I was pulling jellied flesh from a boiled pig's head or kneeling in darkness on a cement floor surrounded by whispered prayers for the restoration of health for a "nearly dead" man, were, perhaps, the most instructive and certainly the most solidifying in terms of my friendships. Understanding the critical relationship between the environment and the way the body feels, its wellness, health, benefited from my living in this way.



The author (left) with her visiting mother-in-law, Amy Linden, washing clothes in the river. Photo courtesy of Victoria Costa

"You get used to it, that's why," is a response to my nodding agreement when my friends and community members notice the sadness that creeps across my face when they ask if I'll miss the village. This insight is telling. Getting used to the rhythm of days in an effort to understand the importance of the practices that make up this rhythm is exactly what I had aimed to do. Although punctuated by informal and formal interviews, time allocation spot observations, pile sorting and other structured data collection, my days practicing the activities that make up a living in Santa Cruz village are what I have become used to. Having participated and observed (Paul Dresch at Oxford once proclaimed that you really can't do them at the same time and I tend to agree), part of the challenge, perhaps, lies in how to extract myself from the practice and take the meaningful knowledge along with me.

Of course there are the more immediate matters, like that of my pregnant dog. "You will miss Tuli," my friends say about my devoted "potlicker." Part of my extraction involves the over-thinking of my surreptitious sharing of my precious pieces of chicharrone in an attempt to preempt the tortilla-only dog diet that will be her future. Too many reflexive moments wondering if I am interfering with a beneficial thrifty phenotype that should be developing in the fetal pups compound the difficulties of extraction. But it is mostly the conversations, the daily visits, the way in which you are never alone in a Maya community, the passing of time marked by the latest bush food that has come into season that I need to learn how to prepare.

"April. I think I can find my money by then," is the response I give to inquiries about when I'll be back. Miami's proximity to Belize allows me to have confidence in my promise. I explain about the finite nature of project funding and my need to write about what I learned before I am likely to find more travel funds. It seems important to have a specific time, rather than simply as assurance of "soon." Easter. Before we plant corn again. Maybe the (sugar) cane will be ready by then. My return, too, is marked by the changes in the landscape.

Slowly, I prepare to leave. Extraction, like immersion, proceeds slowly. The last survey. A final presentation from the children. The last radio program. Final meals. A party with marimba music and dancing. Interruptions in the rhythm that mark my departure and experiences that will carry me back again.

Kristina Baines is a doctoral candidate in Applied Anthropology at the University of South Florida. She holds an MSc in Medical Anthropology from the University of Oxford and an MA in Social Anthropology from Florida Atlantic University. She is currently completing fieldwork for her dissertation, Good Men Grow Corn: embodied ecological heritage and

AAA Launches Teaching Materials Exchange

At the 2011 AAA Awards Ceremony, Bonnie Pitblado (Utah State U) said words to the...[More](#)

Upcoming Discussions to Enhance Career Prospects

Have you joined the Versatile PhD community yet? If not, you can do so at: www.versatilephd.com...[More](#)

AAA Mourns Loss of Elizabeth Brumfiel

It is with great sorrow that we report the passing of former American Anthropological Association...[More](#)

health in a Belizean Mopan community while participating in an NSF grant funded collaborative project, *Development and resilience of complex socioeconomic systems: A theoretical model and case study from the Maya Lowlands (NSF-HSD Proposal # 0827277)*. She has co-founded the Toledo Environmental and Cultural Heritage Alliance (TEACHA) with her supervisor, Rebecca K. Zarger and has worked in Maya communities in Guatemala and South Florida. She hopes to use innovative dissemination methods to share the benefits of ethnographic methodologies with a broad audience.

douglas carl reeser is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of South Florida, and is a contributing editor at Recycled Minds. He is currently working on his dissertation research in Belize, examining the intersection of State-provided health care with a number of ethnic-based traditional medicines. He also loves food.

This entry was posted in [December](#), [Opinion](#) and tagged [Notes from the Field](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#). [Post a comment](#) or leave a [trackback](#): [Trackback URL](#).

« [From Anthropology to the Peace Corps and Back](#) [Political Cultures and the Revolution in the Cyrenaica of Libya](#) »

One Comment



Alissa Jordan

Posted February 1, 2012 at 1:49 pm | [Permalink](#)

Beautiful writing, very nice prose.

[Reply](#)

Post a Comment

Are you a member? [Post a comment](#).

Posting comments is a benefit for AAA members. Please leave your name so we can verify your membership and approve your comment. Want to become a member? Click [here](#) to join.

Your email is *never* published nor shared. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Comment

You may use these *HTML* tags and attributes: ` <abbr title=""> <acronym title=""> <blockquote cite=""> <cite> <code> <del datetime=""> <i> <q cite=""> <strike> `