

Holland, D. & Lave, J. (eds). (2001). **History in Person, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.**

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This anthology on “History in Person” is a result of an advanced seminar in the year 1995, Santa Fe, New Mexico. The topic of the anthology is the mutually constitutive nature of long and complex social, political and economic struggles and the historically fashioned identities-in-practice and subjectivities that they produce. The anthology brings together written examples of ethnographic research on practices of identity by Begoña Aretxaga, Steven Gregory, Dorothy Holland, Michael Kearney, Jean Lave, Dan Linger, Liisa Malkki, Kay Warren and Paul Willis. The bright reader of this review will recognize one of the co-editors of the book, Jean Lave, in the interview by Steinar Kvale presented in the first part of this newsletter.

In general, this book is an elaboration of a theoretical understanding of social practice theory. It takes its departure in the application of social practice theories in ethnographic research. Readers familiar with situated theories on learning elaborated by Jean Lave (among others) will recognize an expansion of the concept of the person in social practice theory in respect to the relation among situated, local struggles and historical subjectivities. The introductory chapter by Holland and Lave is well-written and presents a perspective on the constitution of identity in local practices inspired in particular by Bakhtin’s dialogism termed as such by Michael Holquist (1990). Dialogism labels a central organizing theme in Bakhtin’s contributions to literary analysis and criticism, to linguistics, and to anthropology. It insists upon the existence of persons in time and across places and on the generativity of the cultural genres through which people act upon themselves and other. Bakhtin’s perspective is presented only in relation to an elaboration of the respective chapters presenting ethnographic research. Some readers might therefore find it illuminating to consult Bakhtin’s own work to gain a fuller understanding of its potential in relation to social practice theory.

In their introductory article, Holland and Lave write that examples of long term conflicts inflicting local struggling of identity may be the well-known cultural and political conflicts in Northern Ireland, South Africa or the persistent and riveting conflicts in workplaces, households, and academic fields. A focus on history in persons suggests that practices of identification are appropriated and transformed in local articulations of long-term struggles. Struggling points at the active engagement of identities and subjectivity in local practices “finding the meaning of what is going on”. Identity and subjectivity is, in this viewpoint, either innate, essential attributes of the person or determined by fixed social classes and

background. Structures of the social are viewed as processes, as a matter of relations in tension.

The authors share a general interest in social practice theory. Social practice theory has an analytical intention of inquiry into historical structures of privilege rooted in class, race, gender and other social divisions as these are brought to the present in local, situated practice. Holland and Lave refer to both Willis' and Bourdieu's argument that history in institutional structures and history in person are never simple equivalents. The central concern is how subjects are in part fashioned and also yet fashion themselves in historically and culturally specific ways and it directs attention to social life in relational, dialogic and dialectical terms. In short, local contentious practice is always the site of historically, institutionalised struggles and historical struggles in person. In relation to the following conception of the person, it is emphasized that persons exist in time and that the social is distributed in, over and through persons. It is emphasized that people act upon themselves and others through cultural genres. These cultural genres are not just verbal forms through which a sense of self and group are developed, but the more encompassing category of cultural forms also involving non-verbal aspects. Subjectivities and their more objective part, identities, are seen as formed in practice through the often collective work of evoking, improvising, appropriating, and refusing participation in practices that position self.

Part One – Struggles in Transformation

The second chapter of the book by Begoña Aretxaga has the title "Engendering Violence". The chapter takes its departure in a vivid description of the second of March 1992, Maghaberry Prison where men and women prison officers stripped 21 IRA female prisoners naked. The stripping naked of the female prisoners was conducted in the midst of screams, insults, and physical violence, and the event triggered an intense public controversy about the nature of institutional practices in the Northern Ireland. The chapter discusses the mutual constitution of gender and ethnic identities, the sexualization of state forms of control and the ways in which violence on the bodies of women creates specific kinds of political identities. Few earlier anthropological studies of ethnic violence have taken sexual difference into account in their theorizing of the body. The universal body of studies of political violence is most often "a male body". In the chapter the women's accounts of being stripped naked are presented, and we witness the humiliation and personal degradation experienced by "the rapes done without penetration". It was the prisoner officer's attempt not only to subordinate women but also weakening their identity as Irish political prisoners. The author draws heavily on Foucault's analysis of modern forms of power aimed at transforming souls, at reconfiguring identity, and she concludes that identity is often imputed by practices of power rather than inherited or chosen.

The third chapter by Kay B. Warren "Indigenous Activism across Generations" presents an analysis of lifetimes of anti-racism activism in a Guatemalan community that has produced nationally prominent leaders in the current Pan-Mayan Movement. The chapter is difficult to read, maybe because it does not explicitly apply the dialogism of Bakhtin introduced by the

editors. The author describes the cultural transmission and political action in the intimate family context of Mayan people and aspects of kinship, education and language as keen aspects of identity. It describes the tension between the older generations of activists having fought for the education of their sons and daughters and the younger generations now living in the cities or in the United States. The educated young generation of Mayans refuses to take the hard manual jobs in the plantations at the coast and they work in the cities, but some of them also return to their hometown community because of kinship obligations. Returning to the community some of them take up the old shaman religion and try to revitalize their Mayan language instead of speaking the Spanish learned at school. The author describes how she formed friendship with one of the locals of her own age who helped her in doing the anthropological work. This young man did not share the author's fascination with local culture, and he demeaned traditionalism as archaic and shamanism as witchcraft. The chapter depicts very vividly the inter-generational conflicts and struggles involved in cultural transmission and the different viewpoints of Mayan culture also within the younger generation. Still, the chapter would have gained from a more systematic theoretical elaboration of the many descriptions of inter-generational perspectives on cultural transmission.

The fourth chapter by Dorothy Holland and Debra Skinner "From Women's Suffering to Women's Politics" presents an analysis of contentious practices in a particular time and place – a Hindu women's festival in a rural area of central Nepal. The chapter draws on Holland and Skinner year long research into the conditions of women in the Nepali community and it is therefore grounded in very serious and committed fieldwork. In the area which is called "Naudada" in the chapter, women used the Tij festival as an opportunity to criticize Nepali laws and cultural practices that privileged men. The festival is a women's place where the women of the community gather to sing and dance. Women who have recently married and moved to new communities are allowed, at this particular moment of the year, to return to their home town. Preparing for the festival the women compose songs in the evenings and the experiences of the women forced to live in foreign places in just recently arranged marriages have often been the theme of the songs, but things are changing in the context of the festival. In the festival of 1990 the women's group composed mostly *dukha* (hardship) songs. In 1991, they composed and sang mostly songs of a different type – *raajniti* (political) songs. The chapter analyses the conditions of change from hardship to political songs relating to higher education and a following more profound political engagement of women in Nepal. It also analyses the general functions of the songs creating a place for the boundaries between self and the characters in the songs to shift over time through incorporation of the words and voices of the other. The Tij festival was an important place for local contentious practice over gender positions, gender relations and feminine identities. The chapter is the one in the anthology most profoundly applying the dialogism of Bakhtin and the proposition that human existence is continually constituted in dialogues carried out both in the social world and in inner speech. In this way it makes a nice and elegant component to the introductory chapter.

Part Two – Practices of Identity in Enduring Struggles

The fifth chapter by Steven Gregory on “Placing the Politics of Black Class Formation” presents an analysis of ethnographic research in East Elmhurst, Queens. It can be recommended as a vivid and elegantly detailed ethnographic study of grass-root activism influencing political decisions. The chapter describes the reactions of the local community residents in East Elmhurst to a state decision of establishing a thirty-foot train from Manhattan going through the community to the airport. The chapter goes into detailed descriptions of community meetings between the local residents and the political decision makers. In particular spotlight is the conflicts between the interests of the local community people keeping their area free from ugly trains hiding the view of the coast and the Manhattan interest in creating a nice and unproblematic transportation route for business people going from Manhattan to the airport. This is also a local conflict between the white people moving the decision to establish the train and the black people struggling against this in the local community having to live with the thirty-foot ugly train. In general the chapter examines the formation of black class identities through cultural politics of grass-roots activism. In contrast to a static and binary model of African-American class structure the author underscores the heterogeneity and fluidity of black class identities. Class dispositions are exercised, contested, and reworked at a variety of sites and this shows the local struggling on conditions of identity formation. The local community people did in fact manage to shoot down the idea of the train and influence a new and much more expensive and smaller-scale plan for a light-rail airport access.

The sixth chapter by Paul Willis “Tekin’ the Piss” presents a long interview with Percy who works in an old factory in England with 250 employees. The factory produces engine castings and is called “Midlands Foundaries”. The interview was part of the participant observation done by Paul Willis subsequent to that reported in “Learning to Labour” (1977). In the interview Willis discusses with Percy the phenomena “piss take” as a widespread form of humour, especially in exaggerated male cultures for example in the bar, in relation to sport and criminal cultures. Still, Willis argues that the major and connecting site for this certain kind of male humour continues to be the shop floor. The chapter is a well-written illustration of “piss-taking” seen as a cultural genre in Bakhtin’s terms. This kind of harsh joking and having fun at work becomes a prevalent means of negotiation of meaning and identity for the factory workers. To engage in “piss taking” is to kill time, it is to not-work while working, and it represents a sort of counter-culture to the dominant managerial view. It becomes a meaning system and an expressive code for mounting resistance to authority. The “piss-take” inhabits the formal structures of work, contributes with other perspectives on factory life than the managerial viewpoint. In the end it may also change the system. Willis applies the example of the piss-taking to illustrate his argument that there is a need to develop specific understanding of particular sensuous/material mechanisms within the larger fabric of capitalist social formation. The free-floating post-modern approaches cannot often grasp material realities and Marxism is collapsed. Therefore, to find “class” or “history in person” the researcher has to analyse actual cultural practices at particular sites.

The seventh chapter by Daniel T. Linger “The identity Path of Eduardo Mori” reveals history in one person through 2 interviews with Mori conducted as part of person-centred ethnography. This ethnography is described as a corrective to anthropology’s long-standing tendency to fetter sociological abstractions. Eduardo Mori is born in Brazil by Japanese immigrants and he now lives and works in Toyota City (An auto-manufacturing Centre). The chapter explores the conflicting and colluding identities of Mori as both organized Japanese and a warm-hearted Brazilian. Moving to Japan he found out he was not really Japanese, but Japanese with a Brazilian flavour. He did not understand the Japanese language and he was much more talkative and impulsive than the Japanese people. The chapter takes issue with both social constructionist and causal psychological explanations of the identity of Mori. The interpretation of his life course does not reduce him to a social product or a psychodynamically or cognitively driven automaton. The author challenges these deterministic social and psychological theories and argues for the concept of “meaning-making” as an attempt to declare the fact of agency. Part of this implies giving credit to both social and psychological explanations in the attempt to restore the person in ethnographic research.

Part Three – Futures in Contest

The eighth chapter by Michael Kearney “Class and Identity” examines the socio-cultural dynamics of the contemporary indigenous peoples from the state of Oaxaca in southern Mexico. The author asks how these people in the beginning of the twenty-first century endure as distinct identities within the greater Mexican nation-state. One answer to this is that inequality manifests itself as ethnic differences. I cannot go into much detail with the descriptions of the larger socio-economic changes in Mexico and its influence on the persistence of inequality, but an interesting general point of the chapter is the elaboration of Jujitsu theories of cultural domination. Jujitsu is a weapon-less system of self-defence and the analogy between theory and self-defence systems is made in respect to a distinction between cultural dynamics of top-down domination and jujitsu forms of domination which mobilize the active efforts and momentum of subjects in their own self-defence. The author identifies four different jujitsu theories in social sciences and one of them is represented by Paul Willis. Willis presents a jujitsu model with his focus on resistance as integral to the production of class difference. The viewpoint is that people can only partially penetrate into, understand and react to the conditions of their own class position.

The ninth chapter by Jean Lave: Getting to be British, draws on fieldwork in Porto on the port wine trade and its enclave of old firms owned by former British inhabitants. The chapter analyses the struggles of the participants in the British enclave to retain the distinctiveness of being British in Porto. Being British in Porto has until recently implied a prestigious position, privilege and power. This power position is now challenged by multinational companies with employees working only a few years in Portugal and then moving on to other positions in the company in other European cities. Some of the old gentlemen of the former British companies sold to multinational agents are now employed as sales-persons losing their former management positions. A few of those with a British ascendance choose now to engage profoundly in the Portuguese society while others try to retain the British identity by sending

the children to the British school and spending spare-time in British clubs and the British church. Getting to be British is described by Lave as a lifelong, highly engaging problem for those who aspire to it. The points of the chapter are highly relevant as a conceptual framework for analysis of the identity conditions of immigrants in many (and not only privileged) places of the world. How do immigrants create, rebuild or refrain from distinct identities fighting for a liveable future and what are the different trajectories of these groups of people in particular contexts?

The last chapter by Liisa H. Malkki, *Figures of the Future*, does not present the finding from former field work as it is the case with the other contributions in the anthology. Instead, the chapter discusses aspects expected to appear in the author's coming research project on Hutu exiled in Montreal, Canada. The conceptual framework of the project is therefore the most interesting aspect of the chapter. The author argues that visions and narratives of the future have been left out in studies of national identity and national thinking. It is common to see the imagination of the future dismissed as daydreaming and fantasizing. In contrast to this, the author regards both the past and the future as produced from the social here-and-now giving shape to this same moment. The past is therefore no more real than the future and both (seen as social productions) direct and shape the present circumstances. As a psychologist trained in the psycho-dynamical insistence on the importance of the past and the intense research on memory in the psychological science, I found the category of the future highly inspiring. Why not embrace on this category more fully in psychological theorizing of the person and subjectivities? What does the creation of utopias and dystopias mean for our psychological life of the present and how are these utopias and dystopias produced in particular practices of everyday life?

One may ask at the end of a review. Why read this particular book? It is, as evident from the above presentation, a strange collection of fieldwork in strange places, but let me give at least two reasons to engage with the book: 1) First of all it represents an elaboration of the concept of the person in social practice theories which have been asked for by many scholars interested in apprenticeship and social learning theory. 2). Secondly, it illustrates ethnographic fieldwork at work. Although there are few explicit methodological discussions in the book, the chapters illuminate the handicraft of ethnographic description and committed fieldwork across places and over extensive periods of time. No better description of "how to do it" can be found than through reading the reports of experienced and recognized researcher. Let this be my recommendation of further inquiry into "History in Person".