

My goal as an anthropologist is to explore the ways human beings construct their social worlds and find meaning in their lived experience. In the dozen years since I began studying anthropology as a graduate student, my interests have evolved and branched out in several directions. The most significant among them pertain to migration, marriage and childrearing, and the nature of the state in postcolonial Africa.

My first research explored the relationship between identity and territory, and my work on migration fits into a broader effort in the social sciences to study the interactions linking human mobility, cultural identity, and economic development in the contemporary world. My research engages with the study of transnationalism, specifically investigating how people retain significant social, economic, and political ties with places in which they no longer reside. Through the ethnographic study of a particular population of transnational migrants who originate from the West African Sahel and move to many points around the globe, I aim to understand how the construction of cultural identity is conditioned by such factors as geography, economic activity, and religious ideology. My core interests can be encapsulated in a few basic questions. How do migrants manage to construct themselves as being “from” a particular place if they no longer live there? How can they foster these constructions in their children and pass them on from one generation to the next? Finally, why in a cosmopolitan, global world do so many people find it preferable, even imperative, to reproduce identities so closely linked with territory? These questions get to the heart of ongoing discussions about state immigration policies as well as debates over migrant incorporation (and the lack of it) in countries around the world.

While much of the literature on transnational migration examines the upper levels of these processes of social reproduction, concentrating on the roles of governments and hometown associations in promoting ties between migrants and their homelands, my own analysis is situated within a growing number of studies examining a crucial but often overlooked arena at the micro-level: households and kin groups. I am especially interested in how migrant parents tackle the problem of instilling their cultural capital and “home values” in their children born abroad, and how children growing up abroad negotiate the difficulties of an ambiguous or dual cultural identity. In fieldwork conducted among Muslim West African migrants in Brazzaville, Congo (2003-2006), I crafted a micro-level approach using extended participant observation and interviews, integrating this perspective with a broader focus on the production of ethnic, Islamic, and national identities in the migrant community. I also analyzed the ways religious and cultural difference helps perpetuate a status of “strangerhood” for migrants abroad. I found that through a number of different modes of transnational domestic organization, many migrants were able to establish businesses and acquire property in the host society and transfer these assets to their children over the long term, while at the same time ensuring that their children were enculturated in their communities of origin; in this manner, members of this population were able to defy the expectation that their enduring presence in the host society would lead to their inevitable assimilation. From this project I wrote an ethnographic study entitled *Migrants and Strangers in*

*an African City: Exile, Dignity, Belonging*, published in 2012 by Indiana University Press, as well as four articles in interdisciplinary journals and two chapters in edited volumes.

I have also applied the anthropological examination of population issues to women's experiences of infertility in Nigeria. This was the subject of postdoctoral research I conducted (2007-2008) as part of a small team consisting of one other American anthropologist, a Nigerian sociologist, and a Danish demographer. Working closely with my colleagues, I spent nearly three months carrying out ethnographic and survey research in two southern Nigerian communities. This interdisciplinary endeavor has opened up exciting new methodological horizons for me and yielded three multi-author publications in anthropological and interdisciplinary journals, with a fourth currently in press with *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*.

These experiences of studying how people form and maintain families over distances, and how people struggle with expectations concerning marriage and childbearing, eventually led me to a new research project examining the social dynamics of marriage in Bamako, Mali. People in that city today imagine, form, and experience marital unions in dramatically different ways than their parents' generations did, with characteristics of modern companionate marriage intertwining with ostensibly traditional practices of arranged marriage and polygyny. My aim in this research is to discover how marriage for young Bamako residents today both resembles and diverges from previous practice, especially pertaining to expectations of emotional intimacy, fidelity, and childrearing, and how current practices articulate with global discourses about modernity, marriage and romantic love. During preliminary fieldwork in July 2010, followed by a Fulbright-sponsored sabbatical year in Bamako (August 2011-June 2012), I collected a large amount of ethnographic data on marriage through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Analysis of these data is ongoing and I expect them to provide the basis of my second ethnographic book project, detailing the transformation of discourses and practices of marriage in contemporary urban Mali. This project also affords me the opportunity to engage with anthropological discussions of marriage, and I plan to prepare my findings for publication in anthropological journals in addition to the monograph.

The March 2012 coup d'état that toppled Mali's elected president, beginning a period of turmoil unprecedented in the West African nation's history, occurred while I was conducting this fieldwork, and since that time I have devoted considerable effort to following and interpreting developments Mali. My blog about Mali, "Bridges from Bamako," has become a key information source for journalists, scholars, and others with an interest in Mali, receiving more than 220,000 visits over the 19 months following its creation in October 2011. Effectively, Mali's political instability has become the subject of my latest research project, and I have taken on the role of "public intellectual" by blogging and offering my views about the situation in Mali to a broad range of print, online and broadcast media outlets. This role, while unfamiliar and time-consuming, has brought unanticipated benefits for my scholarship, as it has raised my public profile, helped me establish new contacts among academics, journalists and public officials working in and on Mali, and helped me generate new material for publication. Two

articles I developed from blog posts were published in 2012, with two more in the pipeline for publication in 2013. I have given over a dozen invited presentations on events in Mali since returning to the United States after concluding fieldwork in Bamako, and have been asked to contribute analysis to special issues of scholarly journals, to various websites, and to a scheduled roundtable discussion at the 2013 African Studies Association meeting.