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RESOLVING CONFLICTS IN HERITAGE TOURISM: A PUBLIC INTEREST APPROACH

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We addressed the AAA conference theme, “Peace,” in a Saturday morning session, entitled “Resolving Conflicts in Heritage Tourism: A Public Interest Approach.” The session explored the ways public interest anthropology (PIA) can address the proliferating conflicts arising in heritage tourism. A PIA approach to heritage breaks from “top down” institutional models of heritage, instead paying attention to the generative moments of local heritage discourse. Although tourists possess differing motives for visiting heritage sites, people who live in and around heritage sites hold their own representations and attachments that often go unrecognized. Instead, powerful local, national, and international interest groups impose formal representations that agree with their economic and ideological agendas. This process can lead to conflict between promoters, tourists, and local groups, possibly ending in alienation and, at worst, violence.

Given its sensitivity to dialogue within civil society, PIA is rightly poised to examine conflicts ensuing from heritage tourism. An important component of PIA is participatory-action research, where the scholar acts as both researcher and public advocate, investigating the reasons for conflict, presenting their findings to all parties, and participating –when invited—in consensus building. As scholarship and advocacy combined, PIA offers a powerful research design with which to explore heritage tourism anew, providing the scholar with a means to further the goals of anthropological inquiry while promoting conflict resolution and dialogue in civil society.

In the session, scholars from disciplines ranging from cultural anthropology, folklore, public policy, and archaeology presented nine case studies from diverse regions. Elizabeth Greenspan (University of Pennsylvania) explored the on-going memorialization of the World

Trade Center site in New York City where domestic and international visitors imagine themselves part of a larger collective public sphere. Likewise, Guldem Buyuksarac (Columbia University) investigated similar processes at Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey, where groups dispute the redefinition of public space into secular and religious venues. Vida Bajc (University of Pennsylvania) explored the politics of tour guides in Jerusalem, Israel, and Lisa Breglia (Rice University) focused on conflicts in site management and ownership at Chichén Itzá, Mexico. Linda Scarangella (McMaster University) described tensions arising from definitions of and participation in heritage practices in Salish dance performances in British Columbia, Canada; Cathy Stanton (Tufts University) explored similar themes in heritage movements and foodways presentations in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Archaeologists have ignored their role in producing conflicts in heritage and heritage tourism, and only recently has a public component been made commonplace in archaeological research design. Exemplifying this shift were three multiple-authored papers. Kelly Britt (Columbia University), Mary Ann Levine (Franklin and Marshall College) and James Delle (Kutztown University) described their public archaeological program in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, while Melissa Vogel (University of Pennsylvania) and David Pacifico (University of Pennsylvania) reported a similar project in Peru. Morag Kersel (Cambridge University) and Christina Luke (Boston University) presented a comparative project exploring agency and communities in the archaeological replica economy in Latin America and the Eastern Mediterranean.

Three discussants, Florence Babb (University of Iowa), Anne Pyburn (University of Indiana), and Kathleen Adams (Loyola University, Chicago) brought a critical perspective to the session themes. Adams praised the multi-disciplinary representation of session participants, pointing out such rarities at the AAA annual meetings. Aside for comments on individual papers, all three discussants discussed ways PIA can build on applied anthropology's achievements. This might include what Pyburn described as a shift away from questions of whether or not people are interested in heritage to an effort to getting people interested in heritage. No longer can anthropologists remain "professional strangers" to the communities in which they work, observing rather than affecting change. Rather, scholars much engage, collaborate, and work for a variety of vested publics in their attempts to understand and help resolve conflicts in heritage tourism.

For more information on PIA, please visit <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/anthro/CPIA/>.