

Panel Questions & Abstract

1. How did the collision of Trump policies and the COVID-19 pandemic impact the communities in which you work?
2. How are those impacts changing or persisting under the Biden administration?
3. What has local activism in response to Trump era immigration policy looked like for your communities and yourself?

Anti-immigrant politics and nativist rhetoric were hallmarks of the 2016 Trump campaign and continued to be a priority for the Trump administration. The growth of xenophobic and nationalist policies of the Trump era served as a wake-up call to action for anthropologists who work with immigrant communities across the country. These harmful immigration policies helped lay the foundation for the extreme health and economic vulnerabilities immigrants continue to face during the pandemic, synergistically interacting to create the multiple life-and-death challenges endured by immigrants living and working in the U.S. Despite recent changes in leadership at federal and state levels, local communities continue to contend with the effects of these policies, many of which pre-date the Trumpian era. Moreover, the chilling effects of policies proposed and passed during the Trump administration may persist long into the Biden era. In this roundtable, we discuss US immigration politics and place them into conversation with our local immigration research, teaching, and activism. Focusing on a diversity of sites, including California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Oregon, and Texas, we consider the commonalities and particularities of our research and propose new areas for research and action.

Anthropology and Accompaniment in the Time of COVID

In this presentation I will discuss various forms of “accompaniment” my Latinx immigrant friends, research participants, and fellow activists and advocates have engaged in during the pandemic. I will discuss accompaniment as an anthropological praxis of solidarity, focusing on how, together, we have attempted to advocate for immigrant-protective policies in the past 1.5 years, how we have navigated barriers to forms of social support and healthcare, and how our relationships have shifted in the process.

Outline:

- Define and discuss “accompaniment,” providing brief historical background.
- Describe current practices and projects of accompaniment in which I’ve engaged with Latinx immigrant interlocutors during the pandemic, focusing on the interface between immigration and healthcare policy, discourses of deservingness, and emotional experience.
- Conclude with reflections on the promise of accompaniment as a form of feminist praxis-informed, care-based, decolonial anthropology.

-Accessible intro: white, cisgender woman with long brown hair and glasses, with a background of mountains where I live in Golden, Colorado, which is occupied territory of Ute, Cheyenne, and Arapahoe nations.

D sends me a What'sApp: she met with a lawyer who says that she and her family can qualify for work permits as they await their final court date. Her excitement brims through the texts and voice messages she sends one after the other. D and her husband have 6 young children, only one of whom is a US born citizen. The lawyer will charge \$1300 dollars per person for the work permits, and if the family wants them to take the whole asylum case, it will cost \$5000 per person, or \$35,000—and that's just to open the case. My stomach drops listening to her: I think this attorney is scamming and overcharging them, creating a false sense of hope, but I don't know how to tell D this. Unlike during the first 8 months of the pandemic, D's husband has had enough work hours recently to cover their basic needs, but D has taken on night shifts as a cleaner at stadiums and arenas to help cover legal costs, though so far this is the first attorney that has offered any sense of hope. Sometimes, D sends me photos of hockey games, concerts. She says the monster truck rallies are the worst because they fill the arena with dirt that takes until morning to clean up. D asks if I can call and talk to the lawyer with her.

This is but one of hundreds of exchanges D and I have had over the two years I have known her, exchanges that have intensified over the course of the pandemic as she has gone through a difficult pregnancy and birth, an apartment fire that left her and her family temporarily homeless, COVID with a newborn, unemployment and financial crises, and the loss of her brother, among other harrowing struggles. Although fortunately D and her family made it to the US in 2018, before Title 42 and Remain in Mexico/Migrant "Protection" protocols, many of her crises can of course be tied directly to both longstanding and Trump-era exclusionary immigration policies—from having to make a life-threatening border crossing with her then five children in the first place to being unable to qualify for a work permit as she awaits the resolution of her asylum case.

D and I met as I was originally recruiting for my collaborative research project with Sarah on Latinx health, deservingness, and healthcare access in Colorado, but—like many of all of our engagements with research participants—our relationship soon shifted to one that was not so easy to define. In our first interview, I realized that she and her husband had not yet submitted their asylum applications (I-589s), so we sat together in the basement room she rented and

spent hours and hours filling them out, the tendrils of her and her family's biography playing out before me as she tried to remember every address she had ever had, every school she had attended, the birthdays and death days of parents, siblings, in-laws. Soon, our kids were exchanging toys and we were exchanging texts or talking daily, navigating the meager services and forms of support for which she was eligible—or just checking in.

D eventually joined the support and advocacy group I volunteer with, and in the past year I have found myself with her and others in a number of wide-ranging interactions and efforts, from Zoom calls with legislators to advocate for various immigrant protective policies—especially immigrant inclusion in stimulus payments and universal legal representation—to rallies calling for a path to citizenship for all to co-organizing an emotional support group for mothers in the advocacy group, because so many of them have expressed a fervent need for a space to *desahogarse*, or unburden themselves, in the supportive presence of others who get it.

When I presented on our AANIR roundtable last year, I recounted some of the various forms of research, navigation, and advocacy I had been engaged in, referring to it as piecemeal mobilization, a series of scattered attempts to help in the face of crisis and injustice. It felt chaotic and frustrating, and I didn't know how hold it all together in my mind. Having been trained in psychological anthropology, I have always attempted to bridge the subjective and the emotional, on the one hand, and the structural and political economic, on the other. That produces rich work analytically, but doesn't always meet what I see as the ethical imperative to act and not just analyze in the face of inequality and injustice.

As I've considered my roles and relationships and ethical stances more deeply, I've come to see this work and its possibilities differently. To embrace rather than apologize for the way affect, emotion, and politics call me to new forms of caring labor and action, and that lead me away from research questions and applied problems to the sometimes harder project of being there to meet the moment with humility and openness according to the immediate needs of those with whom I work.

Here's where the concept of accompaniment has been extremely helpful for thinking and acting with, and my thoughts about what accompaniment is (and can be) have been deeply informed by conversations with many of you, Kristin in particular, over the past few months. Accompaniment is a concept with longstanding roots in Latin American liberation theology, which—to quote Wilkenson and D'Angelo, offers the “seemingly simple, yet radical understanding that there is power in mutual relationships, and that the intentional presence of another, committed to walking alongside, deeply listening to, and collectively responding with action against systems of oppression can be transformative” (Wilkenson and D'Angelo 2019: 151).

I view anthropological accompaniment as a form of pragmatic solidarity and care, of advocacy and friendship that intentionally breaks down the boundaries between research, activism, and carework to counter social exclusion and promote belonging. In the process it brings together feminist ethics of care and decolonial critiques of our field, calling us as anthropologists to act in ways large and small to effect change, to hold space, and to challenge systems of oppression.

I will leave it there in hopes of sharing more during the discussion!

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