

# THE 40TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY (ONLINE)

April 30 - May 1, 2020

## “CONVENIENCE” AS A DRIVER OF SOCIAL ECONOMIES

All times are in Eastern Daylight Time (EDT) [BST - 4, CDT + 1, PDT +3]. Each presentation will be 20 minutes, with 10 minutes for online questions. You will have to register for the meeting online. The meeting link and password will be sent to you by email.

### APRIL 30, THURSDAY, 2020

- 10.30 Opening remarks and welcome to a Brave New World
- 11.00 **Cash Transfers, Class Concerns And Inconvenience: Labour Making In Tanzania’s Social Assistance Programme.** Maia Green, Department of Anthropology, University of Manchester.
- 11.30 **Philanthropy: an Inconvenient Truth.** Ben Eyre, Department of Anthropology, University of Manchester
- 12.00 **Convenient Politics: The Business Case as an Effective Strategy for Organizational Change?** Luzilda Carrillo, Department of Anthropology, California State University, Long Beach.
- 12.30 **Brokers, Banks, and Crosstalk in the Kathmandu Land Market.** Andrew Haxby, Department of Anthropology, Pitzer College.

### 1.00 - 2.00 Lunch Break

**SCHNEIDER AWARD LECTURE: Answering for the Debts of Others: Guarantors, Defaulters, and Tripartite Relations.** Nishita Trisal, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

- 2.00 **The Complexity of “Convenience”: Two Ethnographic Examples.** Michael Chibnik, Department of Anthropology, University of Iowa

- 2.30 **Whose convenience? Cash, Central Banks, and the Politics of Payment.** Ursula Dalinghaus, Department of Anthropology, Ripon College.
- 3.00 **Toward a critical ethnography of remittance practices.** Jeffrey H. Cohen and Natalia Zotova, Department of Anthropology, The Ohio State University.
- 3.30 **Incorporating Gender, Class and Generation into Convenience as Care.** M. Ruth Dike, University of Kentucky
- 4.00 **Amazon Go, Surveillance Capitalism, and the Ideology of Convenience.** Jenny Huberman, Department of Sociology, University of Missouri-Kansas City.

**May 1, FRIDAY, 2020**

- 10.30 Morning Discussion
- 11.00 **Inconvenient Friendship: How Successful Cocaine Dealers Manage Social Obligations.** David Crawford, Fairfield University
- 11.30 **Accounting convenience over accountability: Malaysian sovereign wealth funds and the racialized politics of school financing.** Laura Elder, St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN.
- 12.00 **Between Starting up and Catching Up: Conflicting Convenience(s) among Entrepreneurs in India.** Ipshita Ghosh, Syracuse University.
- 12.30 **Trust for the sake of "Convenience"? Fiduciary Small change in the Ancient Near East (140 BCE-224 CE).** Alireza Khounani, New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World.
- 1.00 - 2.00 Lunch Break and Business meeting
- 2.00 **Convenience is not just for the developed: Strategies for convenience among residents of Manantali, Mali.** Dolores Koenig, American University
- 2.30 **Dependent (In)Convenience: Experience of Development and Change in Nepal.** Pearly Wong, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- 3.00 **Beside the Berm.** Dominic Piacentini, University of Maine.
- 3.30 **Post-Conference Discussion and Debate**

# **THE 40TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY OF ECONOMIC ANTHROPOLOGY (ONLINE)**

**April 30 - May 1, 2020**

## **“CONVENIENCE” AS A DRIVER OF SOCIAL ECONOMIES**

Although much of our contemporary lives are built around what is convenient for us, ‘convenience’ – as a driver of innovation and development within human societies – has not been a subject of much anthropological analysis. The focus has rather been on ways in which different societies view and seek greater efficiency/efficacy, ease, necessity/need, expedience, comparative advantage, and adaptability in their relationships with the socio-material and political-economic surroundings. ‘Convenience’ is common to all of these factors and thus begs the question of its role in the story of human evolution. In this scenario, innovations and ‘progress,’ and their consequences are outcomes of humans trying to increase the level of convenience in their duties, tasks and routines in both small incremental innovations and modifications, as well as large inventive leaps driven by desire for a short cut, a quick fix, an easy solution, a.k.a. what is convenient.

Along this line of thought, we propose further unpacking the role played by convenience in past and present social economies. What is the relationship between convenience and necessity, efficiency, expedience, comparative advantage, and adaptability? How do people in small scale societies understand and operationalize convenience? Can we identify and differentiate the role of convenience in past technological developments? What is the impact of convenience in past and contemporary consumption patterns? How do producers and manufacturers understand and incorporate convenience into their products?

The discussions would also focus on the intended and unintended effects of convenience as a multi-faceted complex phenomenon. Seemingly benign, it is possible that the unfolding and numerous unintended consequences of the drive for convenience become sinister or even malevolent. For example, as pointed out by Foucault, the medicalization of the body within modern nation states, with documentation, archiving, and controlled sharing of individual medical histories, is simultaneously a) a convenient efficient means for delivery of good medical and public health, and b) an emergently convenient and efficient means by which the state and institutions exercise power over the body-politic. The evolution of the smart phone is another example. Starting from its

initial function of wireless communication, cell phones have added many applications to their platform, for texting, email, and games, followed by web-browsing, etc., until it has become a necessity across the world. In the process, increasing research worries about the 'dumbing down of smart phone-users,' impacts on social structure, individual psycho-social and physical health, and cognitive functions. Other researchers worry about the impact of demand of the convenience of the world at your finger-tips on environmental and human landscapes: extraction of cobalt and coltan, the use of plastics, the disposal of toxic waste within areas occupied by vulnerable groups. Convenience can hence be a very powerful force for social, economic, political, and ideological amalgamation, aggregation, and centralization, or for division, segregation, and dispersal.

### **PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS:**

**CARRILLO, Luzilda.** Department of Anthropology, California State University, Long Beach.  
**Convenient Politics: The Business Case as an Effective Strategy for Organizational Change?** 12.00 pm, April 30, 2020

#### **Abstract:**

This paper examines the business case—a neoliberal economic justification—for diversity as a convenient organizational strategy constructed in response to the systemic dismantlement of affirmative action. Diversity scholars have shown that since the 1980s, management discourses about diversity in organizations reflect the disentanglement of “economics” from “morality,” wherein the latter has largely been defined in terms of social justice (Lorbiecki and Jack 2000). By producing knowledge and value over diversity, diversity professionals, which include human resource professionals, management consultants, and diversity officers, seek to redress issues over workplace discrimination through market logics. Diversity professionals claim that the business case is effective for creating “inclusive” organizational cultures and structures, because it foregrounds economic rationality and interests for organizations and employees, regardless of race and gender. In examining the relationship between effectiveness and convenience, this paper situates the business case as a post-Affirmative Action organizational political and economic strategy.

I trace how diversity professionals imagine and narrate the effectiveness of the business case for diversity. First, I unpack diversity professionals' claim that affirmative action programs failed, because they created racial workplace conflict, whereas the business case succeeds, because it enrolls all economic actors, including white men, by appealing to their economic interests. Second, I examine how diversity professionals produce value in diversity by tying concerns over racial representation to organizational and industry concerns with market competition. Lastly, I show how they tie diversity to state and national narratives over the state of the economy. More than adapting to the financialization of organizations, I show how the business case is imagined

as an effective racial, political, and economic strategy, because it purportedly enables diversity professionals to continue advocating for equity-based programs and practices. These strategies, in effect, are convenient. Diversity professionals channel hopes for equity into the scientific and economic processes of neoliberal capitalism, rather than create large-scale economic and institutional structural changes to address systemic discrimination.

This paper is situated at the intersection of economic anthropology, science and technology studies, and critical management and diversity studies. It builds on ethnographic research conducted of diversity professional networks in the United States. From July 2014 to June 2016, I traced the production of knowledge and value across three main sites: (1) at a diversity non-profit organization, which I call American D&I (2) at over 50 events, including workshops, trainings, and networking events, and (3) at three national and international diversity conferences. I observed and interviewed diversity professionals that included management consultants, business scholars, and employees from human resource and diversity departments, as well as Chief Diversity Officers, executives, and board members of various for-profit and non-profit firms. I also created a “modern archive” of popular and academic diversity literature.

**Reference:**

Lorbiecki, Anna and Gavin Jack (2002) Critical Turns in the Evolution of Diversity Management. *British Journal of Management* 11: S17–S31.

**CHIBNIK, Michael.** Department of Anthropology, University of Iowa. **The Complexity of “Convenience”:** Two Ethnographic Examples. 2.00 pm, April 30, 2020

**Abstract:**

Although social scientists have written extensively about the influence of convenience on consumer choices when shopping, they have only occasionally examined the many other decisions affected by attempts of individuals and groups to make things easier for themselves. The limited attention by economic anthropologists and other scholars to convenience may stem in part from conceptual difficulties. “Convenience” is multidimensional, subjective, and culturally and situationally variable. People vary in which aspects of convenience are important to them; what is regarded as convenient in some places and times may be regarded as inconvenient at other places and times. Whose convenience is also relevant. What is convenient for the powerful is often inconvenient for the powerless. This paper illustrates these complexities through an examination of convenience and inconvenience in two very different situations.

When I conducted fieldwork in the Peruvian Amazon in the 1980s, many farmers sought credit for rice growing even though obtaining loans for cash crops was difficult and risky. Barely literate farmers living in hamlets along the Amazon River signed credit forms written in a bureaucratic language that only a few could understand. Loans were obtained in several long boat trips to distant branches of the Agrarian Bank in the city of Iquitos. The unpredictable rise

and fall of the Amazon River often resulted in low rice yields that made recipients of rice loans unable to repay their loans. The conditions farmers had to cope with in order to get credit would be regarded by most of their counterparts in the United States and Europe as prohibitively inconvenient. Some of the inconveniences for farmers, moreover, were clearly conveniences for bank officials. While farmers along the river understood all too well these difficulties and inequities, most nonetheless thought that seeking agricultural credit was more convenient in some ways than the alternative of not trying to obtain loans.

Editors of academic journals often complain about the difficulties they encounter in their attempts to find peer reviewers for manuscripts submitted as potential research articles. Because such reviewing is time-consuming and provides few tangible rewards, many scholars decline requests to provide comments on manuscripts. Journal editors therefore often tinker with ways to reduce the amount of time and effort they spend recruiting reviewers. The methods I devised to find reviewers while editing *Anthropology of Work Review* and *American Anthropologist* exemplifies the importance of context when discussing convenience-related decisions. The ways I tried to reduce my workload in recruiting peer reviewers differed for the two journals. For *Anthropology of Work Review*, I increased the probability of getting a scholar to agree to offer comments on a manuscript by writing personally-tailored letters to potential reviewers from my professional and social networks. In contrast, I was minimally involved in the selection of reviewers for manuscripts submitted to *American Anthropologist*. This work was delegated to the journal's editorial assistant and its large editorial board. These differences were related to the resources available to me as editor and the number and types of manuscripts submitted to the journals.

**COHEN, Jeffrey H., and Natalia ZOTOVA.** Department of Anthropology, The Ohio State University. **Toward a critical ethnography of remittance practices.** 3.00 pm, April 30, 2020

**Abstract:**

The World Bank notes that officially recorded remittances reached a record \$689 billion globally in 2018 including \$529 billion to low- and middle-income countries surpassing foreign direct investment and more than three times the rate of official assistance (see see KNOMAD 2019). While these figures are rather mind-boggling, they do not tell us how remittances are used or the effects that their presence have on sending communities, households and movers. In fact, remittances have both positive and negative outcomes and can affect movers, non-movers and their communities in myriad ways. Our paper is organized to help understand the costs and benefits that remittances and the act of remitting hold for movers and non-movers at points of origin and destination. We use ethnographic research in Mexico and Tajikistan and build upon a household model of migration (Cohen and Rodriguez 2005) to examine the meaning, place, and role of remittances for migrants and for migrant well-being. We argue that while remittances are critical to household successes – particularly in rural settings – and may appear to create a convenient pathway to growth and economic success, they are clearly not convenient. Though often affirming and a key to family reproduction, household maintenance

and community development; remittances can destabilize and undermine local practices as movers and non-movers as well as others in their communities rethink life, engage in new kinds of labor and reconsider roles, responsibilities, traditions, the environment and more (Cohen 2011, Zotova and Cohen 2019). Moving beyond ethnography to evaluation, we use the second part of our presentation to asks, why do so many researchers expect that remittances will be “convenient”? Building further upon our data, we argue that too often, the dynamic effects of remittances are minimized and ignored while their role in driving economic development is celebrated (Cohen, Jones et al. 2005). Understanding remittance practices demands we rethink academic boundaries and use ethnographic work to reconsider the centrality that development and economic growth often hold in our evaluations.

### **References:**

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**CRAWFORD, David.** Department of Anthropology, **Inconvenient Friendship: How Successful Cocaine Dealers Manage Social Obligations.** 11.00 am, May 1, 2020

### **Abstract:**

Based on a series of life history interviews with retired drug dealers, this paper examines opportunities and challenges in the suburban underground economy. “Friendship” is key. Suburban drug dealing occurs exclusively through networks of friends, kin, and the acquaintances thereof. This makes it far safer than urban (“flagrant” or “street level”) dealing because suburban dealing happens in private spaces among people who trust one another; neither the police nor competitors can easily identify the practitioners, or infiltrate the networks. At the same time, cultivating friendship is time consuming and, especially in the context of cocaine dealing, expensive. It can be profoundly inconvenient. Drugs are never just “sold.” Much gifting and counter-gifting, “hanging out,” and “partying” are required. On one hand, every deal is an economic exchange. On another, the encounter is the very definition of sociality for its own sake, a way to establish and nurture relationships. This is a cultural conundrum for the Dealers. The way dealers (and others in the middle class suburbs of America) think of it, friends are defined by disinterested affection for the person. This is demonstrated via generosity and

what is seen as genuine personal interest. You should not be interested in the friend for something; you should be interested in the friend. A friend cannot be a convenience. However, drug sales introduce economic versions of interest into these friendships, and having a drug dealer as a friend can be very economically convenient for a user of drugs. The interviews show three different ways dealers cope with the paradox of commerce through friendship: 1. Denying altruism and generosity (the “it’s just business” explanation, where gifts are really enticements for more sales), 2. denying economic interest (“I wasn’t really dealing, only helping people get drugs”), and, finally, 3. taking the “business” out of the context of friendships by, for instance, selling only while at work in a regular job, like bartending. This latter strategy evidently works because feigning friendship is already what bartenders and other emotional proletarians do. Friends are functionally necessary for the suburban illegal drug business, but also economically inconvenient, they represent “transaction costs” in conventional economic terms. This suggests some obvious problems with conventional economic terms.

There are obvious connections between this and key ideas in economic anthropology, preeminently the insights of Marcel Mauss. In Keith Hart’s reading, for instance, Mauss understands neoliberal (“self-interested”) explanations and expectations to be as utopian as those of the doctrinaire communists agitating in his era. For Mauss, gifts and self-interest and selflessness, generosity and profit, are intertwined. Dealers vividly demonstrate the deep human experience of entanglement: love and money, friends and customers, convenience and the labor that underpins it.

**DALINGHAUS, Ursula.** Department of Anthropology, Ripon College. **Whose convenience? Cash, Central Banks, and the Politics of Payment.** 2.30 pm, April 30, 2020

**Abstract:**

This paper will explore competing claims on the convenience of payment forms through the lens of central banks’ changing relationship to cash. Banknotes are the national calling cards of central banks, so we often hear. However, increasingly, we are met with the directive that this store or that venue is “cash-free.” In a payments landscape where the greater “convenience” of digital payments over cash is both presumed and promoted for consumers, what is the underlying price of digital convenience for central banks when banknote pedagogy is lost?

Based on long-term fieldwork with public communications specialists at the German Central Bank and on my recent policy work advocating for cash as a “public infrastructure” (Dalinghaus 2019), I argue that the public mandate of central banks is intimately tied to the future of cash, especially in the euro area. When physical euros were rolled out to the public in 2002, the convenience of shared cash that seamlessly crosses national borders of Euro member states was a key selling point. The tangible euro would remind Europeans of the shared project. But what of the future where digital payments, mostly privately controlled, displace the need for physical cash? What are the implications of replacing physical euros with digital payments that no longer signal any obvious connection to an issuing central bank? And to what extent could

digital fiat replace physical cash? Whose convenience is the shift to digital payments really serving and to what ends? Cash management, logistics, and physical money objects are a significant aspect of the behind-the-scenes work of central banks. However, as a tacit institutional practice, this crucial access point to the public is largely absent from the self-presentations of central banker elites (Riles 2018) and the economy of words through which central bank communications circulate (Holmes 2009). In the payments space, the particularizing and boundary making properties of money's "currency form" likewise tend to be elided when comparing the relative convenience and interchangeability of payment forms, overlooking the fundamental differences between cash, card, and digital in terms of issuance, circulation, profitability, and governance.

Drawing on my ethnographic research at outreach, open-door, seminar, and other communicative events and spaces at the German Central Bank in Frankfurt am Main and Leipzig, I show how the materiality of cash matters to the legitimacy of central banks even though until recently, central banks' own self presentation in the arena of monetary policy has largely taken physical notes and coins for granted as monetary policy instrument. Cash is a key lens through which we can study the notion of convenience and analyze the shifting role of central banks in the current global financial landscape.

**DIKE, M. Ruth.** University of Kentucky. **Incorporating Gender, Class and Generation into Convenience as Care.** 3.30 pm, April 30, 2020

**Abstract:**

Beyond liberating humankind from the drudgery of work (Wu 2019), American 1950's advertisements for convenience technologies argued that they would liberate women from the drudgery of reproductive labor (cleaning, cooking and child care (Smith 2013)). In fact, these convenience technologies sometimes save women time (Laudan 2010), but not in all cases (Cowan 1983). Despite reproductive labor often being labeled drudgery, women do find fulfillment (DeVault 1991) and power through reproductive labor (Meah & Jackson 2013). During the 1950's, convenience foods symbolized modernity, success and prosperity (Banwell et al. 2012). In contrast, today, women may be criticized for relying on convenience foods because they represent the decline of cooking skills and rise of obesity (Ulijaszek 2007). Despite such discourse demonizing convenience foods, Warin et al. (2019) and Meah & Jackson (2017) argue that convenience can also be a form of caring for oneself, loved ones, distant others and the environment.

Based in practice theory (Schatzki 1996), this paper utilizes the "convenience as care" framework (Meah & Jackson 2017; Warin et al. 2019) to investigate how intersecting gender, class, and generational differences shape the everyday uses and meanings of convenience technologies and foods in urban Morocco. While Warin et al. (2019) discusses some class implications using the convenience foods as care framework, my paper expands

upon this by examining the conveniences' multiple layers of contextual meaning that change rapidly based on gender, class and generation.

The paper analyzes data collected during 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Rabat-Sale, Morocco from April 2018 to September 2019. I conducted 57 semi-structured interviews with married working- and middle-class Moroccans in Moroccan Arabic, as well as extensive informal participant observation. In addition to personal daily interactions, I spent 1 week each living with 4 different Moroccan families to experience the rhythm of everyday life and to calculate hours spent performing reproductive labor. Rather than one facet of identity simply dictating social economics, the intersection of multiple facets of identity (gender, class and generation) shape what types of convenience technologies and foods count as care or not for the Moroccans that I spoke with. Although reproductive labor is typically performed by women (Meah & Jackson 2013), men and children are more willing to care for their family by performing this labor in urban Morocco as convenience technologies become more affordable and make certain tasks "easier." In 1-income working-class households, male breadwinners often define care by their wives baking and cooking from scratch and the absence of certain convenience foods. In 2-income middle-class urban Moroccan households, convenience foods are more acceptable.

Convenience foods have multiple meanings and histories: processed Western foods signify both unhealthy eating and higher socioeconomic standing or class. Different generations contest whether or not convenience technologies and foods actually constitute caring for one's family and who should be the caretaker. In this paper, I examine the complex ways in which urban Moroccans define convenience technologies and foods as care or not, based on the intersections of gender, class and generation.

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**ELDER, Laura.** Department of Gender Studies, St. Mary's College. **Accounting convenience over accountability: Malaysian sovereign wealth funds and the racialized politics of school financing.** 11.30 am, May 1, 2020

**Abstract:**

Through an ethnographic analysis of the promotion of Islamically framed ideals and development institutions in Malaysia, I show how Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs) have instantiated school financing programs that reinforce existing racialized inequalities and provide new opportunities for accumulation via dispossession to state-connected elites. Through interviews and participant observation at these funds, I show how the financial metrics used by Malaysia's SWFs provide a convenient "bait and switch" – as counting is substituted for accountability. For example, the Key Performance Indicators for schools are set – by outside consultancy – as numerical representations of student's learning but are proprietary and, therefore, kept secret from both the public and from students themselves. Further, as third-party independent assessment of project's social impact is optional under the guidelines for Islamic financing set by the government, these school financing initiatives set a benchmark for Socially Responsible Investment which institutionalizes the principle of non-disclosure. Promoting a neoliberal model of individual flexibility, the proprietary KPIs measure four key areas for improvement whereby each school and each student must provide evidence of "meaningful change." Meaningful change in this case, however, is the convenience of numerical translation for institutional investors wherein school numbers will easily slide into their Corporate Social Responsibility budgets, yielding additional tax breaks, and thereby improve profitability. Because SWFs are hitched to sovereign authorities, they are most often viewed as institutional pivots in the financialization of nation-state policies. But further, I show how, as SWFs move into new domains such as education and healthcare, risks are shifted onto ordinary citizens and rewards accumulate among institutional investors.

**EYRE, Ben.** Department of Anthropology, University of Manchester. **Philanthropy: an Inconvenient Truth.** 11.30 am, April 30, 2020

**Abstract:**

Philanthropy is often framed as a matter of efficacy and efficiency (Bornstein, 2012; Singer, 2015). The more money allocated in the right way the “more good” that donors and the organisations they support can do. Critical voices counter such narratives by exposing the social construction of these ideas by hegemonic forces (Parmar, 2012; Edwards, 2009). But these accounts receive little traction because they tend to dispute what is effective, for example, rather than interrogate concepts of efficacy or efficiency.

Based on three months participant observation among different organisations working with (ultra-)high-net-worth donors in the City of London, this paper suggests that thinking through convenience at three levels reinvigorates critical reflection on important facets of philanthropy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines convenience as “being able to proceed with something with little effort or difficulty.” Some organisations look to increase charitable giving by making it easier for people affected by others’ needs through techniques borrowed from behavioural economics that nudge people into donating, while others remove perceived barriers to devoting large amounts to charitable causes. These have been effective. Donor advised funds, for example, have experienced huge growth in the last decade by removing the costs and burden of establishing a charitable foundation (The Economist, 2017). Online giving, meanwhile, has grown as different platforms make it easy for people to donate to the causes they care about. But what is the cost? Complex social and economic drivers of poverty, climate change, and human rights abuses are flattened within narratives that posit effective and efficient philanthropy as the answer because it is expedient to rely on such representations to generate donations rather than engage in critical analysis. Participants focus on the means and not the ends of their giving (Trundle, 2012). Philanthropists proceed without self-reflection and advocates of philanthropy normally reject any claims that it might be a symptom let alone a cause of the problems it ostensibly aims to tackle. Despite this, in the final instance, an inconvenient truth remains. Only a tiny proportion of philanthropic funding makes the kind of transformative impact that is claimed by its exponents. Rigorous methods of analysis such as randomised control trials, themselves fetishized by philanthropists, show how rarely achieved are the kind of transformations represented by philanthropy as merely the matter of a transfer of funds.

This paper is not meant to repudiate philanthropy nor does it suggest that philanthropists will not listen to critique. Recent response to Anand Giridharadas (2018) has shown that some acknowledge the limitations of their approach. Instead I suggest that convenient philanthropy is an oxymoron. Perhaps it is the magnanimity (or generosity) proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche as both a lifetime’s struggle and the highest expression of the will to power in which I find the potential for virtue in philanthropy.

**GHOSH, Ipshita.** Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University. **Between Starting up and Catching Up: Conflicting Convenience(s) among Entrepreneurs in India.** 12.00 pm, May 1, 2020

**Abstract:**

The cultural dimensions of entrepreneurial activity in India has often been read through the lens of *jugaad* (Jeffrey and Young 2014; Jauregui 2014). Characterized by the constraint-driven resourcefulness and everyday hustle of marginal actors like fixers and brokers, *jugaad* has become a byword for low-cost improvisation. *Jugaad* can involve a range of practices from reliance on informal networks for furthering one's economic interests to circumventing laws. Therefore, it constitutes a strategy of convenience for marginalized economic actors who use these practices as a means to level large gaps of power with institutional elites. Moreover, in policy circles, it has been touted as an ingrained cultural trait that ordinary citizens employ to overcome socio-economic adversity (Kaur 2016).

However, in recent years, as the Indian state has positioned the nation as a hub of global entrepreneurship, the self-serving hustler is seen as a cultural other, whose practices are in stark contrast to 'modern' startup founders. The entrepreneur is envisaged as an innovator who devises technological solutions to socio-economic and environmental challenges for the rest of the society. These startups and their founders generate financial and moral value for India. In contrast, the marginal actors practicing *jugaad* are deemed to produce no value, given their exclusive focus on making do. Moreover, as many policymakers have declared, the culture of *jugaad* creates a negative image for Indian entrepreneurship across the world as "*jugaad* is not innovation". These policymakers and analysts argue that contemporary startup spaces emerging in cities are distinct from *jugaad* practices: they are modern, orderly and globally competitive.

This paper draws on 14 months of ethnographic fieldwork with entrepreneurs and investors in Delhi. My research took place within a cultural and policy landscape where entrepreneurship is being increasingly regulated for the convenience of domestic and global investors. One of the ways this is done is through a focus on standardization, such that startups across India are encouraged to work and look a certain way, similar to their counterparts in Silicon Valley. In this context, *jugaad* is seen as an inconvenient cultural practice that needs to be removed for the convenience of the state and investors.

My main argument is that this opposition between *jugaad* and innovation emerges because they represent two distinct ideologies of convenience. However, everyday practices of the cosmopolitan technology entrepreneur are often strikingly similar to those of a small-town fixer. Leveraging informal social connections, finding legal loopholes to ease financial burdens, engaging in barter relations with fellow entrepreneurs – the everyday practices of *jugaad* are deeply embedded within high-tech startup spaces. One of the central contributions of this paper is to show that entrepreneurship in India is being reframed as an elite project, serving twin purposes of enhancing the legitimacy of the state and the expansion of venture capital. Using the prism of convenience and tracing the differing ways it has been reframed through evolving policy and cultural discourses, one can analyze the changing relationships between entrepreneurs, investment capital and the Indian state.

**References:**

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**GREEN, Maia.** Department of Anthropology, University of Manchester. **Cash Transfers, Class Concerns And Inconvenience: Labour Making In Tanzania's Social Assistance Programme.** 11.00 am, April 30, 2020

**Abstract:**

Convenience is not merely a way of optimising investments and activities. As a twentieth century artefact of scientific modernity it has valence as a potent symbol of modernization. In former colonial countries which have focused on national development since the nineteen sixties modernization remains a key aspiration associated with non agricultural lifestyles and characteristically urban styles of housing and consumption. Convenience as a shorthand for modern lifestyles conveys related associations about labour, temporality and relations with other people. This paper examines the discursive life of convenience in contemporary Tanzania in the context of a national anti poverty programme funded by donors. Ideas of convenience, science and optimisation are invoked to justify core features of programme design as well as structuring relations between those defining themselves as middle classes and the kinds of people targeted by the programme living in a situation of poverty.

Tanzania is a formerly low income country in Africa which is striving to attain middle income status. It has an expanding public sector creating a booming middle class. Inequality is rising. The performative practice of access to convenience through technology, lifestyles and consumption is a defining characteristic of emerging middle class identity. A national cash transfer programme directed at the poorest thirty percent of households has been in operation for the past five years in most parts of the country. The programme is implemented through a social action fund heavily influenced by donor paradigms. Implementation thus becomes a demonstration opportunity. For international development theories as and a space in which the established class relations of community development are played out. This involves , the educated teaching the less educated how to transcend 'the mindset of poverty and the continual demonstration of lifestyle difference between development agent and passive subject of development. Ideas of science and self evidence conveniently legitimate the expansion of the donor programme as a 'medicine against poverty' while claiming access to convenience for beneficiaries becomes a claimed rationale for their enrolment in an electronic payments system that will to provide a gateway to financial inclusion, enabling them to become self supporting entrepreneurs. This is presented as optimising resources to achieve sustainability, conceptualised by middle class patrons as ending problematic dependency- on the programme

and yet more interpersonal obligations to the less fortunate which can be experienced as overwhelming. Middle class narratives about the programme valorize its potential to reduce their interpersonal burden at the same time as expressing reservations about longer term financing and sustainability. This paper is based on a total of 12 month ethnographic fieldwork in three districts in Tanzania between 2014 and 2019. Interviews were carried out with government officers, representatives from central government, representatives of development agencies, implementation staff and volunteers, programme beneficiaries and low and middle income people who were not involved in the programme.

**HAXBY, Andrew.** Department of Anthropology, Pitzer College. **Brokers, Banks, and Crosstalk in the Kathmandu Land Market.** 12.30 pm, April 30, 202

**Abstract:**

Few social figures seem more at odds with the contemporary emphasis on convenience than the informal land broker. Lambasted for corruption, opacity, and inefficiency, at best such brokers are portrayed as necessary bridges between different embedded markets, at worst as crooks profiting from their monopolizing of relationships and information. Yet, while brokers are understood to help create the market they serve, little attention is given to how their methods can affect the substantive shape of those markets. As I argue in this paper, informal brokers not only help to transact land, but also create economic dynamics that, despite the apparent inconvenience of their methods, actually protect landowners from the vagaries of financialized markets.

To explore this argument, I offer an analysis of the land market in Kathmandu. A quickly expanding city, Kathmandu land prices have exploded over the past ten years, in part due to the influence of a burgeoning financial sector. Though on the surface families have seemingly little control over the price of their land, I argue that their employing of informal land brokers allows their personal evaluations of their own land's worth to influence financial forces, helping to create a market where land prices seemingly "never go down." Using Michele Callon's theorizing of economic performativity, I explore the ways different potential framings of land value illuminate each other--what I call crosstalk—and how this phenomenon paradoxically depends on owners being bracketed out of the negotiation over their land's sale, a service that brokers provide. Thus, through my ethnographic accounts of land sales and brokerage techniques, I present brokers as more than simply an inconvenient "transaction cost," but as key to the formation of an unusual market, one that both allows for the collateralization of land while also resisting its transformation into a financial asset.

This paper is based on 40 months of ethnographic research conducted between June 2012 and August 2017 in Kathmandu, Nepal. It is part of a larger project on urbanization of agrarian lands and earthquake recovery. For this particular paper, data was collected through the shadowing of informal land brokers, interviews with landholders, market players, and government officials, and workplace ethnography of local commercial banks and finance companies.

**HUBERMAN, Jennifer**, Department of Sociology, University of Missouri-Kansas City. **Amazon Go, Surveillance Capitalism, and the Ideology of Convenience**. 4.00, April 30, 2020

**Abstract:**

Amazon's staggering financial success has in large part derived from selling convenience as a consumer good. Its impacts on the economy have attracted the attention of journalists and scholars alike. Amazon, it is claimed, has revolutionized the way Americans shop, it has devastated the competition from brick and mortar stores, and it has given rise to novel distribution systems that promise more efficient and cost-effective delivery. In a world where "convenience is king," Amazon has emerged as the Emperor (Hyken 2018). Yet despite all of the attention Amazon has received, the product it sells – convenience- warrants further academic scrutiny. While business analysts and marketing gurus attempt to explain how Amazon delivers convenience to its customers, they have yet to ask a crucial anthropological question: How does convenience operate not just as a highly coveted consumer good that stands to mitigate the demands of life in a fast-paced society, but also as an ideology that is integral to the workings of "surveillance capitalism" and the extraction of "behavioral surplus" (Zuboff 2019)?

Taking Shoshana Zuboff's work on Surveillance Capitalism as a departure point, in this paper, I explore this question by focusing on one of Amazon's newest business initiatives, Amazon Go. Launched in 2016, the initiative has involved opening 18 convenience stores across the country, with several more planned in Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco and New York City. As stated in the promotional video, the stores are intended to enhance customer convenience by weaving "machine learning, computer vision, and AI into the very fabric of the store," so customers "never have to wait in line. No lines, no check outs, no registers." Drawing upon a range of data, including promotional videos, marketing reports, interviews with the designers of the initiative, and customer interviews, I show how convenience operates not just as a coveted product and consumer good, but also as an ideology that is central to Amazon's abilities to exploit the "behavioral surplus" of its customers. I argue that just as the ideology of freedom supported and perpetuated exploitative relationships between capital and labor during the period of industrial capitalism, (as Marx famously argued), in the age of surveillance capitalism, the ideology of convenience plays a crucial role in supporting, perpetuating and legitimizing exploitative relationships between consumers and capital. By interrogating how convenience functions in this capacity, my paper seeks to further understandings of the convenience economy while also returning to a longstanding question within economic anthropology; what role do ideologies play in sustaining and perpetuating exploitative economic systems?

**KHOUNANI, Alireza**. New York University's Institute for the Study of the Ancient World. **Trust for the sake of "Convenience"? Fiduciary Small change in the Ancient Near East (140 BCE-224 CE)**. 12.30 pm, May 1, 2020

**Abstract:**

Fiduciary monies require a strong confidence in the issuing authority, and the early fiduciary Near Eastern bronze coinage was no exception. These small changes predominantly monetized the commodity markets, but they also remained significant for the factor markets as labor wages. First introduced in the region during the second cent. BCE and after Alexander's conquest of the Achaemenid Persian Empire, these coins did not easily find trust at the Babylonian market which was reliant on pure silver fractions as early as the third millennium BCE. The cuneiform documents show that the city fell into disarray with famine after the population was coerced into circulating fiduciary coinage, because the king needed the silver for military operations. A different picture arises only about a generation later when bronze coins appear in great quantity as far as Bactria in modern Afghanistan.

There is ample evidence that the ancient empires were negotiated enterprises, and that economic coercions did not hold on a *longue durée* since direct supervision was costly and ineffective, even if possible due to technological constraints, and the best course of action was to delegate (especially) the regulation of local markets to native institutions that were usually reliant on tradition. How, then, did bronze coinage sweep the market and supra-regional exchange? Fiscal policies, for instance declaring bronzes as legal tender for taxation, must have induced confidence in the new money, but it is intriguing that the concept of convenience "as a driver of innovation and development within human societies", as stated in the theme of the Society for Economic Anthropology's 2020 Meeting, could provide new insights into this matter. I will interrogate convenience and its place in the minds of the ancient merchants, and other circulating actors, who spread these fiduciary monies across the markets of the legendary ancient cities of Babylon, Susa, Ecbatana, and Merv, by presenting a revised model of exchange spheres which Jane Guyer employed, in *Marginal gains: monetary transactions in Atlantic Africa* (2004), to argue that the abundance of one "all-purpose money" connected presumably isolated regions through trading centers and with the help of institutions that facilitated exchanges through value conversion. Did the circulating actors trust the unitary fiduciary money to overcome disparate value traditions for operating a convenient supra-regional exchange?

The convenience for the mercantile groups who had become economic peers, thanks to close alliance with the issuing authorities that certified the fiduciary coinage, might have brought inconvenience for those who did not have access to the same medium of exchange. The abundance of bronze coins of client kings from southern Mesopotamia and Susiana facilitated movement of goods across the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean, but this new development might have been at the expense of those at Persis whose kings were not authorized to issue bronzes and thus relied on the tradition of weighing silver fractions which possibly hindered large-scale monetization in the local kingdom. A close conceptual and metrological (weight analysis) of early fiduciary bronze coins, by intergrading the concepts of trust and convenience as a force of advantage and disadvantage, would shed a new light on how the mediating actors facilitated the growth of exchange.

**KOENIG, Dolores.** American University. **Convenience is not just for the developed: Strategies for convenience among residents of Manantali, Mali.** 2.00 pm, May 1, 2020

**Abstract:**

Much discussion about convenience focuses on so-called modern conveniences, such as smartphones. However, humans throughout their existence have sought ways to make their lives easier, to facilitate activities that they already undertake. In an article in *Putting People First*, a volume on international development edited by Michael Cernea in the 1980s, Conrad Kottak discussed Romer's rule, which suggests that "evolution occurs incrementally as gradually changing systems keep on attempting to maintain themselves." In particular, Kottak suggests that smallholder farmers often change to keep what they have, a kind of "self-maintenance" as their environment changes. In other words, "the motives that modify their behavior are usually provided by their traditional culture and the concerns of everyday existence" (p. 438).

This paper analyzes the people of Manantali, Mali, who were forcibly resettled in the mid-1980s by the Manantali dam on the Bafing river. These people had lived in an isolated area of the country, with no year-round roads or regular markets. Their main connections to the national political economy were a few government representatives and a rural development organization that emphasized peanut cultivation for export. This organization provided agricultural equipment and inputs on credit, later reimbursed by peanut sales. This paper is based on research carried out in 2016-18, approximately 30 years after resettlement, by a research team of the author and Malian social scientists, some of whom had carried out previous research at Manantali. Data are both qualitative and quantitative. Some 144 households, many of which were studied previously in 1993-94 and during the resettlement, provided the core of data.

Dam construction forcibly relocated people but put in new roads. Most people moved downstream of the dam, to take advantage of what they saw as new possibilities. Although people continued to farm and to consider themselves farmers, they adopted new conveniences. In particular, mobile phones and motorcycles were among the most popular. Often these were used to maintain existing activities and social relationships. Elders consistently said that one advantage of telephones was the ability to inform other villages of deaths. Mobile phones also allowed rural families to keep in touch with migrant children and to receive remittances through money transfers. Motorcycles took people to markets, health clinics, and also helped people maintain social relationships.

However, life after resettlement is quite different. The new conveniences demand a higher standard of living; people need incomes to pay for telephones, phone cards, motorcycles and fuel. Thus, people have adopted new forms of income earning. By the time the research project began in 2016, people had begun to conceptualize new livelihood and lives, which demanded new economic strategies. For example, people complained about resettlement villages with pre-resettlement housing types on lots of various sizes and shapes; they argued that the project

should have built cement block housing and laid out villages on a grid, creating the option for titles, a new form of property.

**PIACENTINI, Dominic.** Department of Anthropology, University of Maine. **Beside the Berm.** 3.00 pm, May 1, 2020

**Abstract:**

“When I go picking, I just walk down the road, and I walk up the road, and on each side, I just go, looking along, you know.”

In her titular ethnography, Kathleen Stewart asks her readers to picture the side of the road as “a dense discursive landscape of encounter,” a “fecund ground of wide-ranging associations,” and “a ‘place’ that comes into view when something happens to interrupt the ordinary flow of events” (1996: 33–35). This paper returns to West Virginia to consider the side of the road also as a convenient place to pick wild foods and medicines.

In North Central West Virginia, the side of the road is in-filled with plants and mushrooms: ramps, sassafras, chanterelles, elderberries, apples, pokeweed, mullein — more. One man digs sassafras: “I just kind of drive along, and if I see it growing along the roadsides, I just jump out and pull it.” Another, ramps: “[they] may grow right down the county roads, and generally folks want it easy, so they just pick them beside the roads.” And another: “I literally drive down the road to figure out where my elderberry bushes are.” While the side of the road is “in-filled with desire” it also “palpitates with vulnerability” (Stewart 1996: 37, 5). It is a space to take delight in — yet hazardous in the way of road pollution, traffic, and trespass. As processes of privatization and toxification restrict access to forests across West Virginia, the side of the road is a serendipitous and convenient space to practice commoning not in the absence of private property, but in its casual disregard (Halperin 1994). “We’ve hunted mushrooms from cars on private property that no one knew we were on so many times”; “Yeah, I was just along the road; it’d be like state road property, I suppose. Nobody says anything.” The side of the road is owned, but by whom? And how far does it go? And who cares? Rhoda Halperin has said that the challenge of understanding property’s role in “material means provisioning” is to better “develop models and concepts for cultural economies in which the notion of ‘private property no trespassing’ is completely foreign” (1994: 236). I argue that the challenge is instead to consider places where ‘private property no trespassing’ is completely normal, but mediated through commoning. By disregarding the expectations of private or public property owners, those picking wild foods and medicines along the side of the road overlay public or private property with common property. The side of the road demonstrates multiple methods of interpreting and enacting property — it is made common as its berries, greens, and mushrooms are picked but also public as it is mowed by the department of highways. Through support from the SEA’s Halperin Memorial Fund, this paper is informed by ethnographic fieldwork in North Central West Virginia during the summer 2019 foraging season, when I conducted qualitative, open-ended interviews and picked and prepared wild foods and medicines with people who find plants in surprising places.

## References

- Halperin, Rhoda H. (1994). *Cultural Economies: Past and Present*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Stewart, Kathleen (1996). *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other America"*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

**WONG, Pearly.** Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison. **Dependent (In)Convenience: Experience of Development and Change in Nepal.** 2.30 pm, May 1, 2020

### Abstract:

Anthropologists have critiqued development approaches, discourses and institutional practices. Some identify shortcomings of development approaches, without challenging the notion of 'development' itself. Others, such as the post-developmentalists, reject outright the notion of development, as a discourse with the power of constraining people's life choices. While these analysis and arguments are compelling, they provide an illusion that development is a coherent entity that is imposed one way in a top-down manner. These works give little emphasis on how individuals themselves phenomenologically experience development (or changes deemed as development) and how those experiences further shape their development imaginaries, even when such understanding is crucial in explaining how development narratives and structures are reproduced. Particularly, most overlook the fact that people do perceive a sense of convenience and improvement in life following the rise of consumption and the change of norms.

In Dakshinkali, people talk about convenience of having easy access to water supply, medicine and education, or more simply, the reduction of back-breaking work that characterizes subsistence living in the past. However, a closer examination shows that convenience in the Dakshinkali is embedded in a dependency on external (cities and usually abroad) labor demand in order to earn wages and gain purchasing ability to acquire convenience. This dependency removes labor power from local subsistent production and in turn perpetuates a reliance on market commodities, which further brings other social, ecological and health implications. Take a local popular snack, instant noodle chau chau as an example. While chau chau is easy to acquire and cook, it requires a cash income for purchasing. It comes with a plastic packet and must be transported to rural areas using roads and vehicles—which means in the Nepali case, visible solid waste, air and dirt pollution. More importantly, it is hardly nutritious compared to traditional snacks like fresh corn or cucumbers. While consumers in the global North are reasonably shielded from conditions of low-cost labor in other parts of the world and have their garbage properly processed or exported, the implications of convenience are highly visible in people's daily experiences in Dakshinkali - pollution and accumulating solid waste in the village hill slope, farmers (or their children) migrating and leaving productive land and families behind, deteriorating food quality and nutrition, as well as shifting societal norms and aspirations across generations that can be no longer realized through earlier lifestyles, giving rise to new forms of anxieties.

Using the term 'dependent (in)convenience' I attempt to better capture the entanglement of phenomenological and structural factors in people's development experiences. Convenience and dependence are simultaneously produced in these experiences, which then create new forms of inconvenience. As a result, convenience and inconvenience are ambivalently produced, as I intend with the term 'dependent (in)convenience'. The experience of convenience then could be quite dangerous, as it belies bigger consequences and perpetuates the conditions of dependency. The Dakshinkali case points clearly to the costs and contradictions in development and raises implications for the notion of 'sustainable development.'