



A LATINO EXPERIENCE OF PLACE IN THE USA: THE DIFFERENCE RACE MAKES.

As the child of Guatemalan missionaries located in USA, Jennifer Guerra Aldana has had to negotiate issues of race and displacement for much of her life. She now serves as pastor in La Fuente Ministries, a bilingual, intercultural, intergenerational congregation, and also as a researcher at the Fuller multicultural youth institute. She describes how in her ministry they seek to hold the tension of an inter-cultural approach which values both Spanish and English speaking cultures and their different insights, and the particular insights which arise from the juxtaposition of the two cultures. Jennifer describes how she became aware of this when, on an occasion, she doodled the words 'I love God' in English and then in Spanish. The word for 'I' in Spanish is not capitalized, which she found affected her

perception of the relative weight of the two words, and the two realities 'I' and 'God'. She wondered if abstract theology was possible, in the Spanish language world, when Spanish gives the word 'God' so much more weight? (See the video at 0- 9.00 minutes.)

In the light of this sensitivity to culture, Alan Roxburgh introduces the conversation about a theology of place and his growing awareness that this conversation sometimes makes assumptions based on white privilege, in particular the capacity to 'choose' a place. For Jennifer, who has lived in many places, these have been significant only as the location of her family and the memories each holds of her journey. Her migrant community have often been forced to move and have sometimes had to actually subvert some traditions of home and neighbourhood in their attempts to live in an environment which may be hostile. (Video at 9.00-17.00 minutes.)

Alan Roxburgh agrees with Jennifer, that for him, home has primarily been simply the location of his family. But as he reads scripture he sees God calling people in the particularities of place. How do we respond to this when our society eviscerates place and disperses people so there can be no social community? Jennifer acknowledges the significance of local context, place or neighbourhood, the poverty of its lack, but feels that it is not the only thing going on. (Video at 17.00-21.00 minutes.)

For Jennifer race is a major factor determining our experience of place and neighbourhood. This came into focus for her when she was connected with a white evangelical church which wanted to run a local programme against human trafficking. She realized that their approach to this was very different to that of her Latino community. The white church desired to act in their neighbourhood as a mission initiative but this was a non-relational engagement, which came out of a desire to help, but not readily to engage in difficult issues like migration policy. The Latinos of Jennifer's community were immersed in issues of migration policy. Their community helping came out of strong relational bonds and their migrant everyday experience. (Video at 21.00-24.00 minutes.)

Alan found this disturbing. The more privileged white community, without strong relationships, were in danger of objectifying the neighbours they desired to help. We need to become more sensitive to the ways that race impacts our presence in our localities- and that will require further conversations. (Video at 24.00-26.00 minutes.)