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Article Debriefing

**Nancy Hiemstra— *Immigrant “Illegality” as Neoliberal Governmentality in Leadville, Colorado***

Article Summary

Hiemstra’s article is a case study about illegal immigrant workers in the town of Leadville, Colorado. She primarily employs a framework of neoliberalism in her work and aims to focus on the ways in which neoliberal practices and expectations shape the immigrant and non-immigrant experience and use of space in Leadville. Hiemstra employs a mixed-methods qualitative approach to her research: collecting census data, conducting interviews and holding focus groups. Both immigrant and native workers are studied and she focuses largely on their perception of one another, as well as how their lives and the town have changed with increased migration to the area.

Hiemstra’s working argument is that neoliberal discourse and “governmentality” (policing and law-enforcing at a local, unofficial level) are negatively impacting the lives of both non-immigrant and immigrant workers in Leadville. The processes of governmentality encourage legal workers to purport their patriotism and defend their territory through dangerously jingoistic lenses; resulting in unrealistic expectations of “Americanism” and legality of their non-native neighbors. Conversely, migrant workers in the area are further marginalized by their own perceptions of neoliberal practices and expectations; immigrants feel subjugated by native workers and even self-impose rules and regulations. These disparities become normalized and intrinsic in the local landscape and dramatically affect the resident’s perceptions of self and spatialities.

Discussion Summary

For our class discussion, we focused on three main aspects of the article: its thesis/topic question and format, its ideological/conceptual framework, and its methodologies and data.

In terms of the paper’s thesis, the class found it difficult to pinpoint any single straightforward instance in which Hiemstra stated her thesis and purpose. The goals of the paper seemed scattered

across the introduction of the article, mixed together with her framework and literature review. The general goal of the paper, however, was still conveyed—however disorganized. Additionally, the class discussed how this article was an example of a case study and the reasons why it was a case study, and why that format was fitting to the topic at hand. Our class discussion also discussed the micro-scale nature of Hiemstra's case study, and the pluses and minuses it brought to her work. In general, working on a micro-scale was seen as a positive, as it allowed Hiemstra to observe interpersonal relations and often occluded meanings in terminologies and practices.

Also important to our class discussion was a debate over the role of Hiemstra's use of a neoliberal framework in understanding and situating her case study. We took time to discuss the meaning of neoliberalism, both as an economic and as a political concept. Additionally, we discussed the term neoliberalism as a potentially pejorative term, and Hiemstra's choice to not address this fact in her use of the term throughout the article. The class agreed that while it was not necessary for Hiemstra to address this aspect of the term and its meaning, it was seen as a potential weakness for her arguments. In particular, however, our discussion of Hiemstra's framework revolved around determining how a clear and effusive political/economic framework could work in a geographical research study. The class determined that a study's findings could employ a framework such as neoliberalism as a means to situate and contextualize the geographic data collected—thereby still focusing the study in geographic knowledge.

Finally, and more briefly, the class discussed the article's methodologies and data. Mostly, the class discussed whether or not Hiemstra's mixed qualitative methods matched the goals of her research question and goals of her study. Additionally, we decided that Hiemstra's conclusions based on her collected data was only somewhat sound. The article's conclusions seemed to over extrapolate the actual findings of her case study, and may not have definitively answered the larger, overarching issues her conclusions claims.