"ARE YOU HEADING TO THE FUN ZONE?": NOTES FROM THE POLISH-UKRAINIAN BORDER

Heidi Mogstad
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Research takes you to unexpected places. After finishing my PhD, I got a postdoc position at the ERC-funded project WARFUN led by Antonio De Lauri at the Christian Michelsen Institute in Norway. Despite the project's playful and provocative title, it is driven by a serious and anti-war agenda: In order to better understand and possibly even mitigate the human costs of war, we need a richer

and more nuanced understanding of what draws people to participate in war and how it might be experienced as pleasurable, normalised or addictive. The project thus investigates the plurality of experiences and affective grammars that are generally neglected by normative approaches to war and soldering, including joy, happiness, mastery and self-realisation.

In April 2022, Antonio and I travelled with a small film crew to the Polish-Ukrainian border. Our purpose was to talk with some of the many "ordinary" citizens we had learned were travelling to the new war theatre in Europe to join the Ukrainian Foreign Legion. This was not a part of our personal research projects, but one of several trips we were doing together with two documentary makers attached to the project, exploring the attraction and experience of war across different societies.

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I had ambivalent feelings about the trip. On the one hand, I experienced similar desires as some volunteers I had interviewed for my doctoral research: people who had travelled to Lesvos during the height of the "refugee crisis" in 2015. Like them, as indeed many other humanitarians, journalists and scholars, I felt an urge to "be there" and witness history unfolding with my own eyes (Mogstad 2021; Papataxiarchis 2016). More significantly, I also supported the documentary's vision and believed it could reach a wider audience than academic research and spark new conversations. On the other hand, my doctoral fieldwork had made me increasingly suspicious of scholarly "crisis-chasing" (Cabot 2019; Rozakou 2019), which I now felt complicit in.

However, our first meeting in Poland reinvigorated my belief in the project. We had stopped at a restaurant in the town Rzeszow, about an hour's drive from the border. A week earlier, Joe Biden had travelled there to signal Washington's intention to defend their NATO allies if the war spilt westwards. After sharing pizzas with US soldiers stationed in the area, Biden had told them they were "in

the midst of a fight between democracy and an oligarch." Certainly, this ideologization of the war was not new. Since the onset of Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, western public discourse has continuously framed the Russo-Ukrainian war as a battle between democracy and dictatorship, civilisation and barbarism, good and evil. There are several problems with this framing. First, it simplistically and inaccurately portrays NATO as a community of democratic values rather than a pragmatic security arrangement. Second, this way of thinking nourishes the idea of a radical division between Russia and "the West", thus reinforcing the mantra that war is inevitable (and diplomacy impossible) or even noble and desirable.

But ideology was far from the only motivation that pulled people to the warzone. While waiting at the counter to pay for our lunch, a white, middle-aged man with short hair and tattooed muscular arms turned towards us with a beer in his hand. "Are you guys heading to the fun zone?", he asked with a cheeky smile and nodded to the camera my colleague was carrying. I had to struggle to contain my mixed feelings of excitement, revulsion and curiosity. Why did he describe the war in Ukraine –with its horrendous damage to human lives and infrastructure– as a place of fun? Was it just an expression of irony or gallows humour or did he really mean it? Moreover, what did my strong emotional reactions say about my personal distance and relationship to the topic of the WARFUN project?

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Both contemporary western discourse and scholarly literature tend to frame war as destructive and undesirable. Moreover, participating in war is typically portrayed as a brutal and painful experience, demanding enormous sacrifice and causing suffering or alienation (MacLeish 2019; Welland 2018). However, in recent years, some scholars have challenged this view. Exploring war from the vantage point of soldiers' narratives and anticipations, they have shown that war can be imagined and experienced as entertaining, pleasurable and even

personally regenerating (Dyvik 2016; Pedersen 2019). Our encounter at the restaurant in Rzeszow affirmed these observations, yet also added nuance. The man who approached us, “Peter”, turned out to be a US army veteran who had served several tours in Afghanistan, Iraq and Central America. When Peter’s mother first saw her son in his military uniform, she had cried with pride, and Peter had felt honoured and accomplished. However, his many years of military service had not come without costs. About six months ago, Peter was involuntarily discharged from the army after being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He took it hard: soldiering had become part of his identity and lifestyle, and he did not know what else to do. Hence, after watching the news about the Russian escalation of the war in February 2022, Peter bought a plane ticket to Poland. “I’m here to help, not to fight,” he underscored during our short conversation at the restaurant. However, when we invited him for dinner the following day, Peter offered a more complex set of reasons. “I am an adrenalin junkie,” he said plainly when we asked him why he had referred to Ukraine as a fun zone. Additionally, Peter admitted that he was not only a humanitarian, but also an entrepreneur: His short-term plan was to help people, but his long-term goal was to learn enough about the situation on the ground to get a contract with the US Army (see De Lauri 2022).

"Interviewing Foreign Fighter" – Image by Anders Hereid & Vegard Lund Bergheim

Other conversations also complicated the image of the war as a clear-cut ideological battle. Some of the people we spoke to were planning to volunteer for the Ukrainian Foreign Legion. For instance, in the village of Medyka, on the busiest border crossing between Poland and Ukraine, we met "Mathias", a 25-year-old man from Finland. While growing up, Mathias had been "taught by [his] uncle to hate the Russians." However, his personal motivations for going to Ukraine were not primarily ideological. As he explained to us over a pint of beer, Mathias considered volunteering for the Foreign Legion a chance to participate in a "a real big war": the first such opportunity since World War II and, in Mathias's opinion, far more interesting than what the Finnish peacekeeping forces were currently experiencing in countries like Lebanon and Mali. Like most of the Norwegian soldiers I have interviewed in my ongoing research project, Mathias also wanted to "test himself" and the skills he had gained when serving in the Finish army as a conscript. Moreover, Mathias had run into economic problems at

home and wanted a new start, in a new country. He was willing to take big risks for a chance to experience "real war" and restart his life. In two days, Mathias had agreed to drive a van to Mariupol to deliver medical supplies. He hoped his bravery would become noticed and that the Foreign Legion or Ukrainian army would invite him to join them.

> ***He was willing to take big risks for a chance to experience "real war" and restart his life.***

Similar to Lesvos during the "refugee crisis" (Franck 2018; Papataxiarchis 2016), the Ukrainian-Polish border attracted all kinds of people with different motivations and agendas: We saw journalists, celebrities, religious organisations, and a wide range of humanitarian volunteers, including a group of Chinese dissidents and a young woman giving out "free hugs" and kinder-eggs. However, it was striking how many war veterans we met who told us they were going to Ukraine to do humanitarian work. Like the foreign fighters, these soldiers–turned–humanitarians told stories that fitted uneasily with the ideologization of the war that has characterised western public discourse. For instance, at the so-called Chinese tent by the border, we met a Dutch veteran named "Dirk". Dirk had served several tours in Afghanistan and Iraq, but emphasised that he was now here to do humanitarian work. Before leaving for Poland, Dirk had bought a big old bus, refurbished it, and painted it white. The next day, he and another veteran were driving to Kiev to deliver medicine and food, and bring back as many elderly people, women and children as they could fit on the bus. When we asked Dirk why he was doing this, he said he had the necessary skills and experience to navigate a war zone. However, reflecting on his transition from soldiering to humanitarian work, he also said that he "wanted to share love rather than aggression." Dirk further emphasised that he did not want to join the Ukrainian army or the Legion because that meant he would have to pick a side. "There are victims on both sides of the war and I don't want to shoot Russian kids," he elaborated, referring to the many young Russian soldiers who reportedly were told they were heading for military exercises.

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Notably, all of the veterans we spoke to decried politics (democratic or otherwise), describing it as inherently self-interested and "dirty". However, in contrast to many European politicians, their personal experiences of participating in wars and military operations had also made them sceptical of military power as a means to bring peace and security. For instance, while crossing the border into Ukraine, we met "Michael", an American veteran who was currently working on a humanitarian project to rebuild damaged infrastructure in Ukraine. After his second tour in Iraq, Michael had grown increasingly disillusioned with the war and described the US missions in the Middle East as utterly stupid and meaningless. Similarly, "Jonas", a Norwegian veteran who had started a humanitarian organisation providing aid to Ukraine, said the post-intervention developments in countries like Kosovo and Afghanistan had made him and many of his former colleagues question the purpose of Norway's military efforts. "Like many others, I was seeking adventure and I truly enjoyed the experience of serving abroad and mastering soldiering. However, in retrospect, it feels bittersweet. Did we really risk our lives for nothing?", he pondered when we met again at a café in Norway a few months later.

At this point, two disclaimers should be made. First, as pointed out by a reviewer of this piece, it is questionable whether all the people we spoke to told us the truth about why they were going to Ukraine. Many people at the border might have reasons to conceal their purpose and identity, including foreign soldiers, spies, and traffickers. Second, as mentioned, this was not a research trip but a documentary mission, and we only spent a few days at the border. Apart from Jonas, whom I recruited for my research project on Norwegian soldiers, the meetings we had were too transient to develop trust and produce insightful ethnographic descriptions and analyses.

"By the Border" – Image by Anders Hereid & Vegard Lund Bergheim

Nevertheless, as a junior scholar new to the field of war and soldiering, I found our encounters at the border to be thought-provoking. It struck me that the war veterans we spoke to provided first-hand and cogent critiques of war, enemy constructions, and military power at a time when even former pacifists call for weapon assistance to Ukraine and societies across the continent prepare themselves for war. Their personal stories and statements challenged reductive and binary representations of war as either destructive or generative, meaningful or meaningless, pleasurable or alienating.

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For instance, even while describing themselves as adrenaline junkies or adventure-seekers, several war veterans pointed to the more sinister aspects of soldiering. As Peter told us soberly, "war corrupts people. It makes you do things that feel natural and justified then, but later comes back to haunt you." Besides

his quest for adrenalin and money, Peter thus described his humanitarian work in Ukraine as a means to heal, even atone for the wounds he had inflicted on himself and others. Similarly, Michael framed his transition from soldiering to humanitarianism as a means to "make amends" and "regain agency and control of his actions."

As a reviewer pointed out, these statements can be read via Michael Jackson's notion of the "logic of reversal", that is, as attempts to repair what is broken or make the world right. However, the point I want to make is more basic and perhaps also less edifying: Regardless of how the war veterans felt about the current war in Ukraine, and whether or not they carried any guilt or misgivings about their soldiering past, they all appeared attracted by war. What is more, the pull of war seemed to have just as much (or more) to do with what the war could offer them as with what they could do for the Ukrainians. As Jonas explained when I interviewed him in Norway: "The war does not leave our bodies when we return home from the battlefield. We veterans, we are like *spente buer* [tight arrows]. We need to go somewhere to release our tensions." For him, as for many of the other people we spoke to during our short trip, the war in Ukraine was a good option as it promised both thrill and purpose. It also offered them an opportunity to remake themselves as warriors, entrepreneurs or humanitarians.

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Counterinsurgency in Istanbul

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“Police, Provocation, Politics” by Deniz Yonucu is an ambitious text that documents the long and complicated history of dissident populations and spaces in urban Turkey in the context of diverse policing and counterinsurgency techniques used by the Turkish state forces. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in *Devrimova*, an Alevi working-class neighbourhood, where dissident leftist/socialist groups have been active, Yonucu traces the changing strategies of state interventions designed to manage political dissidents and isolate the neighbourhood from the rest of the city. Yonucu delves into state archives and analyses security reports, documents and training manuals on counterinsurgency, and demonstrates how global counterinsurgencies inform Turkish policing and counterinsurgency tactics first in Northern Kurdistan and later on in the dissident neighbourhoods of Istanbul.

Yonucu claims that counterinsurgency techniques are not about ending disorder, but rather about managing and bringing it to controllable levels, thereby transforming certain spaces into low-intensity conflict zones. The aim of generating disorder is first and foremost to reduce political struggles to “security” and “terror” issues, and to mark those places as no-go areas in the public psyche. Drawing upon different examples of counterinsurgencies around the world and comparing them with Turkish policing, Yonucu points out that the effectiveness of counterinsurgency informed by the legacy of the Cold War and (de)colonial eras relies on depoliticizing and decontextualizing political struggle of dissident groups and depicting them as mere actors of “irrational” violence. In *Devrimova*, residents and revolutionary groups have attempted to engage with practices of local governance and vigilantism for addressing local problems and taking immediate actions against injustice and exploitation long inflicted upon working-class Alevis and Kurds. Yet, to quell the left-wing mobilization in such neighbourhoods, starting from the 1990s, state security forces have employed a new counterinsurgency strategy that consisted in triggering ethnosecterian tensions, violent provocations, introducing new anti-terror laws, while overlooking drug dealers and gangs. Therefore, Yonucu argues that counterinsurgency does not solely imply police violence. All other instruments of counterinsurgency have been applied primarily to divide potentially dissident groups and generate disorder among them through what she calls “provocative counter-organization”. These techniques are therefore adapted by the Turkish state into the logic of its security practices to divorce dynamics and practices of “subaltern counter-publics”(Fraser 1990) of the urban dissidents from its socio-political and historical causes. In other words, policing functions as anti-politics.

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Chapter 1 examines how the neighbourhood became a sanctuary space for working-class Alevi communities in which the long historical resentment against

them has met the predicaments of working-class people and the mobilization of socialist groups since its establishment in the 1970s. This chapter chronicles the history of how residents as political actors became involved in local self-government and socialist experiences. While the leftist/socialist struggles of the 1970s were deeply interrupted by the 1980 military coup, Chapter 2 examines how the leftist revival re-emerged in *Devrimova*, in parallel to the Kurdish movement and revolutionary groups. Meanwhile the re-emergence of leftist mobilization was thwarted and transformed by different policing strategies of counterinsurgency by the Turkish state forces.

To understand these strategies, Chapter 3 focuses on what Yonucu calls "affect-and-emotion generating provocative counterorganization techniques". By that she means how the ruling elites in Turkey have intervened in the management of the dissident groups with various affective, and divisive, security strategies to disrupt and partition political assemblages, frame their political struggle within the boundaries of ethnosecterian cleavages and confine violence into certain spaces. In turning those spaces into low-intensity conflict zones, Yonucu argues that the state calls for, and provokes counterviolence among socialist groups in a vicious cycle of revenge and retaliation, further racializing and marginalizing them in the eyes of both the public psyche and their constituency. Specifically based on the events that took place in the 1990s, the chapter investigates state attempts, backed by the media discourses, which aim to make the causes of political unrest pointless and relocate the revolutionary violence on the street to the (ir)responsibility of racially framed "deviant" and "impenitent" groups. Chapter 4 documents the vigilante practices of revolutionary groups which, starting in the early 2000s, have been dealing with the absence of the police for preventing criminal activities and drug gangs in the neighbourhood. Yonucu sheds light on how certain forms of vigilantism enable security forces to reproduce low-intensity conflict. She points out that while certain groups and associations address the socio-political roots of crimes and drug dealing, some other masked and armed vigilante groups which define themselves as revolutionary reproduce certain methods of punishment employed by the state. She further adds that the selective

targeting of revolutionaries by the police has worsened the situation. Turkish policing techniques and the circulation of images of armed and masked revolutionaries in the media have legitimized the containment and continuation of (counter)violence in certain spaces.

In Chapter 5, Yonucu charts how collective memory of past resistances and political martyrs affectively inform the present of revolutionary people. Against the fear propagated by counterinsurgency tactics, many residents manage to create webs of solidarity and resistance through what Yonucu calls "inspirational hauntings". The affective formation of the selves, therefore, prevents some dissidents from acting in line with the immediacy of rage and fear, and makes them engage with the space in a more community-minded way. By affective formation, Yonucu means that the memories of past resistance and solidarity in the neighbourhood seep into the present of revolutionaries, affecting their self-ethical formation. While those affective formations might lead to being trapped in the cycle of counterinsurgency, they also pave the way for aspirations of resistance against the state forces and function as a barrier to the provocative counterorganization techniques of the Turkish state. The last chapter, in a sense, summarizes the whole discussion around a case study: the Gezi Uprising. Yonucu first summarizes how different class and ethnosecterian segments of society, including residents of *Devrimova,* forged alliances, and mobilized against the authoritarian turn of the AKP government in 2013. Then, Yonucu draws attention to how the Turkish government and the security forces revisited ethnosecterian tensions and confined police violence to Alevi neighbourhoods, using tactics learnt throughout the 1990s. The book concludes that the Gezi uprising epitomizes the long-term experiences of counterinsurgency techniques used to divide, marginalize and racialize political dissidents, propagate terror among the wider public, trigger ethnosecterian cleavages and confine state violence into "violence-prone" areas.

Yonucu's book is a very timely and ethnographically grounded piece of work that helps understand policing techniques in urban Turkey while situating it within a broader historical, political and global context. Moreover, throughout the book,

Yonucu compares her context with other counterinsurgencies around the world, hence making a meaningful contribution to the anthropology of policing, counterinsurgency, vigilantism and violence/counter-violence. As the last chapter on the Gezi uprising shows, the book provides useful explanations as to why long-term political alliances are difficult to establish in Turkey. In a context of urban segregation, state violence and policing, terror inflicted upon a part of society is usually accompanied by fear experienced by relatively privileged groups. In this context, the book explains why generating disorder in certain spaces is required for the reproduction of fear and terror by which to quell public opposition. In short, policing and counterinsurgency in contemporary urban Turkey have become a powerful mode of restoring the order of the state and the ruling elites. Indeed, through these techniques, the state succeeded to crush alternative ways of world-making and transformed political spaces into certain low-intensity conflict zones, while marginalizing/racializing them.

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However, the book seems to suggest that political agency shaped around counterviolence is an effect of power, rather than a situation which developed as a result of political ideologies. That is, certain practices of political groups, such as, clashes with the police and violent struggles on the streets against drug gangs, are considered as having served the ends of the Turkish state forces. While it might be the case, and actually, the book provides theoretically sound arguments to believe so, given that revolutionary violence is a significant point in political ideologies of some socialist groups in Turkey, these counter-practices need to be further examined ethnographically. The perspectives of the revolutionaries and radical groups engaging with radical violent practices would have required further examination so as to further strengthen the author's

arguments regarding the mimetic relation with the state security forces. This is not a substantial criticism, though. Rather it might be related to some limitations of the ethnographic work and Yonucu herself acknowledges in the very beginning that she did not include outlawed revolutionary groups in her work, i.e the groups which are claimed to be the main actors of revolutionary counter violence on the street, and mimetic stately practices.

"Police, Provocation, Politics" is an important and timely book which helps understand the complicated processes of policing and counterinsurgency techniques against political dissidents in Turkey. Its theoretically broad framework and ethnographically grounded analysis provide important insights on contemporary urban policing in Istanbul and its broader societal effects.

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Worlds of Care

Natalie Davey

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Worlds of Care: The Emotional Lives of Fathers Caring for Children with Disabilities by Aaron J. Jackson is a self-described "meditation on fathers' everyday lived experiences surrounding care and the moral personhood of their severely disabled children" (p. 7). An anthropologist engaged in ethnographic research, Jackson says he wrote the book he wished to have read when his son Takoda was declared severely intellectually disabled early in life. As an educator who spends time writing about teacher-focused care and radical collegiality, I came to this book with a preconceived notion of what would be discussed. Relationality and caregiving are terms I have spent time thinking deeply about, so I anticipated relating to the text both intellectually and philosophically. Beyond my academic interest in the text though, what struck me about Jackson's work was the deeper resonance that took root in me as a parent. I was introduced to the new-to-me notion of "embodied disruption" that Jackson makes central to his

storying of life with his son, and his research into other fathers who care for children with severe disabilities. His philosophical turn to the body, linking both masculinity and care, makes this book a very thoughtful foray into thinking through “personhood, disability and moral agency” (p. 8). What Jackson sets out to do with this book he accomplishes: through his study he reveals the emotional lives of fathers who care for disabled children, emphasizing both pain and joy connected to that care.

The book is divided into six chapters, with two writerly “interludes” and an epilogue that all work to interrupt the academic nature of the research, keeping the reader firmly connected to the very human realities lived out by the participants and the author himself. Jackson describes his book as a form of public personal caring. He “hopes [it will contribute] to the broader project of making more individuals aware of the diverse ways people inhabit the world and our capacity for care which exists in potential” (p. 20). Each chapter unpacks the realities of this broader project in the very specific context of parenting a child with disabilities. Just as Jackson’s eight participants find community in their shared experiences as fathers, the reader is granted access to their intimate moments of caregiving and receiving through Jackson’s gentle narration. Building on Clifford Geertz’ term “faction,” what is “imaginative writing about real people in real places at real times,” Jackson chooses to use creative nonfiction at moments throughout the book so as to “invite the reader to variously inhabit the world of another” (p. 19). Chapter six ends with a meditation on *existential hope* [sic] and it is Jackson’s surprise at what he learns of his participants’ hope for their future as parents of children with severe disabilities that is most thought-provoking for the reader. As he unpacks their caregiving experiences a vulnerable self-awareness shines through in Jackson’s own hope for the life that he and Takoda share. Applying philosopher Matthew Ratcliffe’s language to his own life, Jackson calls what he and other fathers of severely disabled children experience as “a modification of the ‘style’ in which one hopes” (p. 165). Though the participant sampling is small compared to larger quantitative studies about disability and care provision, in its ethnographic focus the book’s turn to

philosophy is a disarmingly gentle way into learning about a world that is not kind or caring most of the time.

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For readers interested in caregiving, be they healthcare providers, educators with an interest in special education, or parents looking to grow their own understanding of life beyond their own family's circumstances, this book offers a window through which to look. Jackson writes, "Through a deepened resonance with unfamiliar others we can begin creating more imaginative and relationally attuned spaces" (p. 20). I believe this book offers the reader an opportunity to connect with the unfamiliar other and therefore, build social capacities for care.

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The intimate life of dissent

Céline Eschenbrenner
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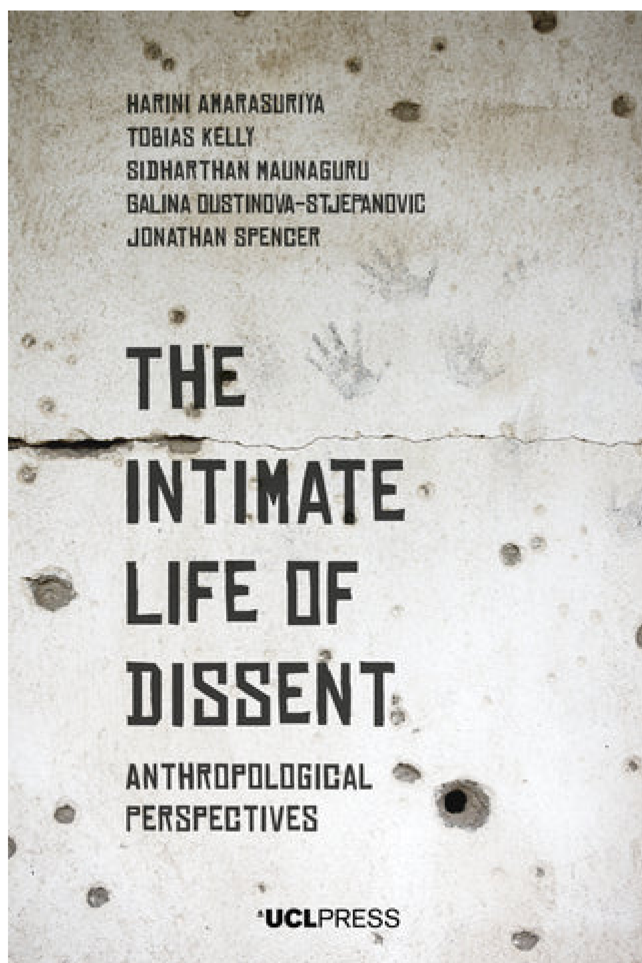
Book review of Amarasuriya, Harini, et al. *The Intimate Life of Dissent: Anthropological Perspectives*. UCL Press, 2020.

The Intimate Life of Dissent examines practices of refusal and resistance through the friendships, kinships and solidarities which withstand and obstruct them. The authors of this edited volume define dissent as a particular form of attachment which draws people in and out of relations and produces its own kind of conformity. In so doing, they separate dissent from its associations with ideas of agency, personhood and progress. The authors of this volume leave behind

discourses of resistance and their romantic undertones to focus instead on the intimate ties, tensions and contradictions which inform the possibility for dissent and the shapes it takes. Far from acting out of individual consciousness, the dissenters introduced throughout the nine chapters of this volume are enmeshed within intimate and sometimes conflicting attachments. Through its focus on the affinities and enmities which run across dissident trajectories, this volume offers a valuable contribution to the study of activism and political anthropology more broadly.

> *Dissenters are less romantic individuals moved by their individual conscience to fight against injustices than people caught up in the constraints of intimate relations and driven by particular affinities.*



In the first core chapter, Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic draws on the written records of political activist Natalya Gorbanevskaya to retrace the political aftermath of the Red Square protest of August 1968 against the military invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops. She takes togetherness and estrangement from Soviet discourse as political practices through which dissidents openly challenge the totalitarian aspirations of the Soviet state. Dissent emerges from the cultivation of activist relationships against the abstract 'we' of the Soviet nation. In chapter 3, Erica Weiss takes up the case of dissent among ultra-Orthodox Jewish Israeli and liberal Jewish Israeli peace activists to

shed light on what she calls “dissent without resistance”. Drawing on interviews with ultra-Orthodox peace activists, Weiss calls for the recognition of illiberal forms of dissent which do not fit the liberal standards of rebellion and resistance but operate within the conservative frameworks of tradition and continuity. In the next chapter, Serra Hakyemez turns to the socialities of Kurdish activists in Turkish prisons to argue that prisoners cultivate dissident identities within carceral milieus. She mobilizes friendship as a concept to understand the endurance of dissident politics in the midst of state repression. From this perspective, friendship is a political relationship cultivated among prisoners to sustain both everyday life behind bars and Kurdish resistance against the Turkish state. In chapter 5, Harini Amarasuriya and Jonathan Spencer retrace the political and personal life of Joe Seneviratne, a Sri Lankan activist, to shed light on the conflicting obligations – to friends, comrades, party members and family – which run across many activist attachments. Drawing on fieldwork in Colombo, Sri Lanka, and interviews with Seneviratne himself, the authors inscribe political commitments within conflicting social relationships and suggest that dissent can translate relations and affects, turning friends into family and love into loyalty. In the next chapter, Tobias Kelly draws on historical archives to shed light on the experiences of British conscientious objectors to military service during the Second World War. While claims of conscience can form the grounds of dissident socialities, he suggests, they can also elicit mistrust and make for awkward relationships. Throughout his chapter, Kelly shows how even for conscientious objectors, who often figure as archetypes of liberal freedom, conscience relates more to a social duty than to an expression of freewill: an obligation toward family, friends, or nation, that is at once personal and shaped by circulating affects, like fear, anger, or pride. In chapter 7, Sidharthan Maunaguru turns to Sri Lankan Tamil former political activists who were active in the 1970s and 80s to suggest that maintaining friendships across political divides can also be thought of in terms of dissent. Moving past the division in political theory between friendship and enmity, Maunaguru draws on interviews with activists from opposed Tamil movements to show that public enmity can coexist with private attachments. Friendship in this chapter refers to the cultivation of an

ethics of care and protection across political boundaries. In chapter 8, Carole McGranahan tells the story of the Pangdatsang family who became prominent in the Tibetan socio-political landscape during the first half of the twentieth century. The author traces the particular trajectory of the Pangdatsang brothers from eastern Tibet to the intimate circles of the Dalai Lama to shed light on submission and refusal as two complementary forms of dissent. Collecting details from the history of the Pangdatsang family, McGranahan argues that the brothers rose to power through a subtle articulation of submission to Tibetan elites – as strategic loyalty – and refusal – as public rejection of the way things are. In the final chapter, Doreen Lee focuses on the production of activist archives and dissident documents in Indonesia during the final decade of the New Order (1988-98). She takes propaganda fliers and prison letters as two forms of activist writings and traces their production, circulation, and consumption to show that dissident affinities are produced and circulated through everyday practices of writing, copying, and reading texts. Political intimacies here rely on an infrastructure of dissent made of mimeograph machines, copy shops and toners. Throughout these eight chapters, the authors of this volume convincingly make the case for socially-embedded practices of dissent. From their perspective, dissenters are less romantic individuals moved by their individual conscience to fight against injustices than people caught up in the constraints of intimate relations and driven by particular affinities.

One of the book's main contributions is to draw a distinction between dissent and subversion by taking dissent as a form of refusal that can sprout from diverse moral grounds. While liberal traditions figure dissenters as individual freedom chasers, other cultures of dissent consider refusal as a dividual practice enmeshed within dense socialities and obligations. From this perspective, dissent can be illiberal, or conservative. On the other hand, loyalty can feed practices of dissent when it expresses bonds of kinship, friendship, or solidarity across political boundaries. This conceptual distinction is fruitful, as it can help us recognize both the conformist potential of activism and the subversive aspects of conservative practices. There are times in the book where clarity recedes,

however, and the reader is left thinking that dissent could virtually take any form, as long as people in their particular cultural landscape interpret it as such. Moreover, while many of the authors in this volume convincingly show how intimate relations can fuel political dissidence, more attention could have been paid to the smothering potential of intimacy; to instances where family ties or friendships stifle activist aspirations. That said, this volume makes an important contribution to political anthropology by examining dissidence through the lenses of intimacy, friendship, solidarity and enmity. It will be of interest to anthropologists, sociologists and historians interested in political movements and activism.

Featured Image by Towfiqu barbhuiya (courtesy of pexels.com)

Sliding through life

Tatiana Rabinovich
November, 2022

On a chilly afternoon in April of 2016, Lana and I were about to embark on a ride through Saint Petersburg's bustling downtown, so she was instructing me how to operate a Segway scooter: "You control it by leaning forward, backward, and sideways." Sensing my unease around the stiff machine, she comforted me: "Listen, you just need to trust your body and slide." I was silently examining Lana's honey-colored eyes and freckles, while contemplating how to simultaneously slide and listen to her. She smiled, revealing a charming gap between her front teeth: "You've got this! Let's go. I will tell you a story about how a young woman from Kazakhstan conquered Russia."

I got on a scooter and followed Lana's tall silhouette down the *Konnogvardeyskiy* boulevard toward the *Nevsky* prospect, overtaken by the rush hour. She moved confidently, knowing well what it meant to "trust [her] body and slide." She had

learned how to synchronize her bodily movements with the boat, rowing oars, and the bodies of her teammates during her professional career in rowing which began in her hometown of Temirtau in Kazakhstan. “How were those years for you?”, I asked Lana, trying to catch up with her. “Oh, life was in full swing!”, she said loudly so I could hear her past the traffic noise, “training sessions, friends and romantic adventures in high school, and a decent performance at the 2004 youth rowing championship in Japan.”

Listen, you just need to trust your body and slide.

After sliding down the streets of Saint Petersburg’s downtown for some time, we parked our scooters by a bridge and silently watched the Neva River shed her ice armor. The descending sun painted the buildings around us in gold and pink: “It was her [Lana’s mother’s] decision to move here, not mine. Saint Petersburg has never become my city,” Lana told me, reflecting on her family’s sudden move from Temirtau in 2009 in response to rising Kazakh nationalism and limited professional opportunities for non-Kazakhs, as Lana’s mother perceived it. “Hmm, I see…And [what about] Islam?”, I asked her, watching her fix her hijab, slightly loosened by the ride and the wind from the river. “At one point, we [teammates and Lana] were on the edge psychologically from trainings and conflicts… so we went on a team retreat to Egypt… and there I had my first vision… It was so powerful and overwhelming… I felt as though a ball of fire entered my body. I took it as my first encounter with Allah. So, it was in 2012 when my career in competitive sports ended and my journey as a Muslim began.” I listened to her and smiled recalling my first trip to Egypt, after which my life also took an unexpected turn.

Lana squinted her eyes at the glowing dome of Saint Isaac’s Cathedral and shivered from a sudden gust of wind from the river: “You know, I slide through life [*skolzhu po zhizni*],” she said turning her face to me, “slip through [*proskalzivau*] everywhere. This is my life strategy. Sometimes it works well and other times it does not. When the strategy is unsuccessful, it becomes an

experience for me to learn from.” On the subway ride back to my apartment, I scribbled down some notes, pausing to think about “sliding through life”. Its exact meaning escaped me, but the sentiment felt very familiar. That night I looked up “sliding” in the dictionary to find some definitions: “moving smoothly along a surface”, “passing quickly and unnoticed”, but also “becoming dislocated” and “slipping or falling by loss of footing.” Like me, Lana was a child of the Soviet collapse, so sliding as a life strategy resonated with me. In one way or another, we had to learn how to navigate complex postsocialist terrains with their open avenues and dead ends. And so, she “traversed” and “coasted over,” “lost ground” and “descended.” As we became closer over time, I realized how Lana was also “sliding” through her newly embraced religion. However, I will leave this story for another time…

> *We parked our scooters by a bridge and silently watched the Neva River shed her ice armor.*

Later that evening, we dropped off the scooters at the small tourist firm where Lana worked and walked to a sushi restaurant to thaw up a little and eat. She shared bits from her family history: “My grandmother grew up in an orphanage because her mother died from plague after fleeing her abusive husband with another man. After graduating from a vocational school, my grandmother left Russia for Kazakhstan to join the construction of the *Magnitka*, one of the largest metallurgical complexes in the Soviet Union. I do not know much about my biological father, apart from the fact that he was of German descent. Germans were exiled to Kazakhstan during World War II. My mother’s first husband was abusive, so she married my stepfather, a hen-pecked man [*podkabluchnik*]. I think there is a program stitched in my genes [*zashita v genah*] and I am trying to make sense of it.” I wondered to myself—but did not ask Lana— whether other women in her life were also “sliding through life.”

A few months after our first ride together, Lana abruptly left her job at that small tourist company and moved to Sri Lanka with a man she had met online. I was out

of town at the time, so she sent me a few photos through WhatsApp – she and her husband rode scooters after their religious ceremony (*nikah*) in exact same location as we did in April. “Off she goes, sliding again”, I smiled to myself, looking at the photo of Lana and her husband in their Colombo-bound airplane. “Swoosh!”

Like me, Lana was a child of the Soviet collapse.

Right before the COVID-19 pandemic began, Lana and I were on a WhatsApp video call. I was in the United States, and she was in Saint Petersburg with her two daughters, settling anew in her old apartment and looking for a job. “My husband and his family stepped on me [*nastupili na menya*]. Imagine a river, whose flow is restricted by stones. Under pressure, it will overflow or flow in another direction, right? So, I took the girls and we left for Russia”, she spoke quietly as not to wake up her daughters. Lana told me how life in Sri Lanka turned out to be more difficult than she had anticipated: she was sucked into a vortex of a complicated family dynamic, professional and spiritual self-search, and motherhood. As she tried to parent and keep the house running, while coaching a team of young female rowers for the 2019 championship in Thailand, her visons reoccurred, leading to a few instances of hospitalization. Relations with her husband became disbalanced, too. At that time, “sliding through life” required reorienting herself to avoid capture and prompted her to ride along, with, and against life’s relentless tides.

I often remember how Lana and I rode scooters together on that chilly afternoon in April of 2016 and wonder how differently we deal with life’s uncertainties. One way is to take cautious steps along a well-trodden path toward a promise of safety and gratification. No matter how carefully we tread, however, nothing on that path is guaranteed. Another way is Lana’s “sliding through life”, swirling around its messy paths, and opening oneself up to unexpected border crossings, visions, and sensations. She taught me that sliding often invites us to navigate the world from a position of the unknown and without an endpoint. It renders us pervious,

unbound, and vulnerable to whatever life holds and whoever we encounter on its winding paths. This way of moving through life is in fact familiar to many of us, as we try to make sense of and live with the ever-increasing instability around us. Sliding then becomes an intuitive method, although without a specific formula. “Listen, you just need to trust your body and slide”, I keep hearing Lana’s words reverberating in my ears, as she instructed me how to ride a scooter.

> *Sliding often invites us to navigate the world from a position of the unknown and without an endpoint.*

As ethnographers, we also slide through fieldwork. We often begin our research with a firm set of questions and intentions to collect data on a given topic. However, after a while, we begin to follow our interlocutors, objects, ideas, and bodies, and arrive in places, not expected or even desired. The field invites us to trust and improvise, while remaining grounded and balanced. It also urges us to hold multiple visions – frontal, peripheral, and rear – and forms of attention, most importantly to the possible. Indeed, as a “practice of critical observation and imagination”, ethnography allows us to “trace the outlines of a possible world within the seams of this one” (Pandian 2019, 4). As I learned from my fieldwork, this emergent world coheres in the interstices of the field. To explore its uneven surfaces and meandering paths an ethnographer learns how to slide.

Among many things, Lana’s invitation to ride scooters encouraged me to embrace my ethnographic intuition and let myself wander, get lost, and become entangled with – and ultimately transformed by – the gifts of the field. For that, I will remain grateful to her and her “sliding” metaphor, which so aptly captures a particular way of being, doing, and knowing.

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Featured image by Marat Mazitov on Unsplash

Technologies of Trust: Introduction

Shaila Seshia Galvin
November, 2022

This post is the introduction of our thematic thread on Trust, *curated by Anna Weichselbraun (University of Vienna), Shaila Seshia Galvin (Geneva Graduate Institute) and Ramah McKay (University of Pennsylvania).*

What do we mean when we talk about trust? Contemporary discourses figure trust variously as a problem, an aspiration, an object of intervention, and even something to be dispensed with all together. An abiding social fact, trust appears to nourish not only interpersonal relations but also scales up to the social orders of governance, politics, and publics. Girlfriends and governments as much as experts and executives are concerned with inspiring, maintaining, and growing trust. To do so they implement a wide variety of measures: from communicative reassurances, to certification schemes, technologies of transparency and

objectification, and legal measures of accountability and compliance. Despite all these efforts, the Edelman "Trust Barometer," itself an instrument worthy of examination, notes that trust in government, media, NGOs, and business has dramatically declined since the beginning of the new millennium. And, we observe, blockchain technology is touted by some proponents as necessary for producing trust, while others see its virtue in permitting trustlessness. In the midst of this confusion and supposed crisis of trust we ask: what is trust and what does it do?

What is trust and what does it do?

Contemporary social, political, and economic life demands new ways of thinking about and theorizing trust. We approach trust not directly, but through technologies such as certification, verification, and inspection as well as institutional arrangements such as aid organizations and health care, which promise to be solutions to problems of suspicion, doubt, corruption, and uncertainty. These and related world-making practices constitute our objects of observation (Trouillot 2003; Galvin 2018; Weichselbraun 2019), and we track how they attempt to materialize and stabilize social relations, with the aim of producing what is often
understood or named as trust. We mobilize ethnographic inquiry to study how these technologies, and practices—not unlike more familiar forms of infrastructure (electricity grids, water networks, highways and rail lines)—constitute "dense social, material, aesthetic, and political formations" (Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018, 3).

Our collaboration brings together scholars within and outside the academy, spanning junior to mid-career stages, as well as MA and PhD students. Across our different essays, we parse the qualities of trust and their modes of production, asking how material objects, bureaucratic and regulatory practices, as well as diverse kinds of technologies—from forensic testing to blockchain—work to configure and condition trust. The settings of our research vary—from the

corridors of humanitarian action to the securitized perimeters of wildlife sanctuaries and sugar plantations, from Zoom calls to organic farms in Switzerland and India, and from the digital worlds of Web3 and Facebook livestreams to the clinical environments of covid testing centres.

> *We parse the qualities of trust and their modes of production, asking how material objects, bureaucratic and regulatory practices, as well as diverse kinds of technologies work to configure and condition trust.*

Across these diverse sites, trust emerges as a fragile, situated, often ambivalent and always a relational accomplishment. Sometimes it is built up through the provision of a predictable structure with familiar routines as in Hesse's analysis of the Covid testing centres in which seemingly superficial changes in the protocol can raise suspicion/doubt in the efficacy of the process. In Billaud's contribution, the ICRC's careful work of building trusting relationships in communities victimized by urban violence is undermined by efforts to formally produce "trust" at a different level of the organization through bureaucratic procedures and techniques geared to producing measurable results. And from a Malian sugar plantation, the setting for a global health workshop, Biruk reflects on the need to locate (mis)trust in global health in the material, historical, and infrastructural realities of the
plantation itself.

In this regard, several essays explore the relational dimensions of trust, considering the range of human and nonhuman actants implicated in the work of trust-building. McKay asks how trust is "facilitated and foreclosed" as medicines move across jurisdictional boundaries, from pharmaceutical importers and inspectors, to laboratory testing, to online pharmacies that fill prescriptions for overseas customers. Spurred by a Zoom call about self-managed medication abortion in the US, McKay explores ways that trust in pharmaceuticals is not generated by pharmaceutical regulation itself, but comes to encompass a wide array of human, technological, and political actants. Such an array of human and

nonhuman actants are found, too, in McClellan's essay which examines how recurrent demonstrations of the efficacy of technologies of security and surveillance within a Jordanian wildlife sanctuary prove crucial to establishing and sustaining the trust of both local residents and the sanctuary's captive animals.

> *In a world where crises of trust are proclaimed in things as diverse as political institutions, food, pharmaceuticals, health care, and news, trust can no longer be a rarefied object of scholarly inquiry.*

A spatial and relational focus on trust commonly contrasts the proximate and the distant, the personal and impersonal, distinctions that Borghi queries in his study of an organic farm and market in Geneva. Yet a number of essays in this thread foreground instead issues of mediation and immediation, which prove equally germane for understanding relations of trust and suspicion. Both Weichselbraun and Zhang's contributions highlight the role of media (semiotic) ideologies in the construal of the trustworthiness of mediated representations of reality. The promise of immediacy as a solution to problems of socially based mistrust or uncertainty informs both the use of Facebook Livestreams by Peruvian peasant leaders as well as motivates the development of blockchain-based cryptocurrencies and communities. In Galvin's essay, it is instead mediation in the form of techniques of verification—from forensic tests to certification protocols—that promises to bring organic quality into being as a tangible truth, while the question "is it really organic?" points to the underlying complex interplay of (mis)trust, truth, and a persistent desire for immediacy. Finally, Plüss demonstrates the ways that trust is commodified through the integration of blockchain technology into food supply chains, notably IBM's Food Trust platform. Unlike the cryptocurrency developers who laud the potential of blockchain to replace or dispense with trust all together, companies such as IBM promote blockchain technology as a solution to the problem of mistrust.

In his reflection on the essays in this collection, Taylor Nelms offers a broad conceptualization of trust as a pragmatics of social life. Indeed, these essays show how technologies and tools of trust are mobilized in various ways to address intractable and practical problems of uncertainty, risk, and unknowability, among others, and so are located within, not outside of, social relations. In a world where crises of trust are proclaimed in things as diverse as political institutions, food, pharmaceuticals, health care, and news, trust can no longer be a rarefied object of scholarly inquiry. Ethnographic approaches that foreground the inescapable complexities of social relations move us closer to developing a critical anthropology of established and emergent technologies of trust.

IMAGE: Photo by Nick Fewings on Unsplash.

Humanitarian Technologies of Trust

Julie Billaud
November, 2022

“Trust in humanitarian action” was the top item on the agenda of the 33rd international conference of the Red Cross movement which took place in Geneva in December 2019. The reason for such a thematic choice was, according to a statement published on the conference’s website, the wide-spread perception of a “declining trust in institutions and governments, an increase in public scrutiny, and calls for stronger integrity and accountability” (ICRC 2019). Between the lines, one could easily read a desire to find an institutional response to a series of scandals that had tarnished the reputation of several prominent international organisations in the years that preceded the conference (Gayle 2018; McVeigh 2019).

But beyond these episodes which pushed the Movement to take a public stand in favour of greater accountability, trust remains a major operational concern of

relief agencies. “We operate in contexts where we’re relatively powerless so the only thing we have is trust”, an employee of the International Committee of the Red Cross told me once. By underlining the key importance of trust for humanitarian organisations, she conveyed the idea that alleviating human suffering required a constant effort of impression management among ICRC’s interlocutors, be they weapon bearers, governmental authorities or affected populations. Trust was therefore less conceived as a cognitive capacity or affective disposition than as a conscious operational strategy (Carey 2017, 20) for accessing populations in need.

Since the 2000s, external pressures for ‘evidence-based’ programming have pushed humanitarian organisations to establish more collective and managerial forms of trust. While ‘operational trust’ primarily relies on interpersonal relations and references to the law, ‘accountability trust’ (Slim 2019) is generally accomplished through internal compliance and control mechanisms as well as procedures meant to enhance beneficiaries’ participation. The 33rd conference, which called for more transparency, reflected the growing salience of ‘accountability trust’ in the humanitarian sector.

In this essay, I examine how these two forms of trust are accomplished in violent urban contexts. I chose these specific situations because there is not internal consensus on how to address them and because they have historically triggered heated debates between those who consider them as a deviation from the ICRC’s core mandate – notably because they tend to integrate development components disconnected from the organisation’s historical orientation toward situations of emergencies – and those who on the contrary share the view that they represent a necessary adaptation to the changing dynamics of warfare worldwide. These tensions enable me to examine the organisation’s mode of operation in situations that do not directly fall under the traditional juridical scope of ‘armed conflict’ and to simultaneously highlight a paradox in the ICRC’s conception of trust. Indeed, while the organisation’s legalistic logic has traditionally led to a conceptualization of trust as the end-result of a “moral contract” rooted in the Geneva Conventions and operationalized through “confidential dialogue” and

face-to-face interactions, more recent concerns for accountability have surprisingly led to the establishment of managerial procedures where trustworthiness is achieved through the emptying out of social relations (Corsín Jiménez 2005).

Mandate-based trust and the 'urban problem'

"Throughout history, the ICRC has broadened the category of 'victim' and expanded the scope of the response. But from the outset, its approach has been above all pragmatic and not idealistic at all. What matters is the response, not the morality that guides that response (...). Unlike the French Sans-Frontières movement, which is based on revolt, the ICRC does not have this desire to revolt in its DNA. There is no culture of protest. In this sense, the organisation adapts more easily to the Anglo-Saxon managerial model with its fascination for efficiency that leaves little room for idealism." (Interview, February 2016, translated from the French by the author)

This is in such pragmatic terms that an ICRC employee working at the headquarters in Geneva explained to me the organisation's historical expansion of its activities, beyond those provided by its international mandate as guardian of the Geneva Conventions. Indeed, since its inception, the ICRC has been preoccupied with human suffering even in situations where international humanitarian law does not apply. Because the original objective of the Conventions was to standardise the rules of war, "armed conflicts" – and more specifically those of an international nature – are the benchmark upon which all situations of violence are addressed. Its "right of initiative" in Non-International Armed Conflicts (NIAC) is nevertheless guaranteed in article 3 common to the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

> *These doctrinal developments highlight the centrality of legal interpretations and diplomatic negotiations in the broadening of categories of "victims" worthy of humanitarian aid.*

The organisation’s operational practice and doctrine have been adapted over time to address the humanitarian consequences of violent situations that do not reach the level of an armed conflict. For example, the term ‘Other Situations of Violence’ (OSV) appears in Red Cross law (i.e the legal and regulatory texts adopted during the Movement’s statutory meetings) but the notion has no formal legal implication: it remains non-binding “soft law” from which no enforcement can be derived.

To justify its involvement in contexts marked by urban violence, the ICRC therefore draws an analogy between “other situations of violence” and “armed conflict”. Both situations involve the use of force and have similar humanitarian consequences such as torture and ill-treatment, physical and psychological damage, disappearances, deprivation of freedom and separation of families. Commonalities between the two contexts, in spite of the lower intensity of violence in OSVs, entrust the ICRC to “offer its services” to state authorities, notably by visiting detainees in prisons, where it enjoys unique access and expertise.

A number of strategic re-alignments occurred in the 1990s and 2000s, demonstrating an increased awareness of the connection between urbanisation and the irruption of violence in cities. During the 30th conference of the Movement in 2007, urban violence started to be perceived as distinct from violence in armed conflict and a causal link was established between social inequalities, discrimination, poverty and the occurrence of violence (ICRC/IFRC 2007). New forms of interventions and categories of victims (beyond the original focus on prisoners) were identified as a result, including the youth, victims of sexual violence, displaced persons and families of minors in detention.

These doctrinal developments highlight the centrality of legal interpretations and diplomatic negotiations in the broadening of categories of “victims” worthy of humanitarian aid. While an analogy between armed-conflict and urban violence granted the organisation’s access to prisoners, ‘soft Red Cross law’ reinforced its legitimacy in operating in ‘other situations of violence’. References to the law

effectively served to maintain states' trust in the organisation while placing them in the position of privileged operational partners. It simultaneously advanced a rather limited response to urban violence, not geared toward addressing its root causes but rather meant to mitigate its humanitarian consequences through targeted interventions.

Operational trust and confidential dialogue

In spite of recent efforts to understand the specific characteristics of urban violence, notably its systemic aspects, the legal basis of actions undertaken by the ICRC greatly explains the organisation's focus on armed violence in urban contexts. Consequently, most activities implemented in cities somewhat mirror those the organisation is accustomed to carry out in situations of armed conflicts. In the Maguadoran city of San Sombrero [1], for example, where the ICRC has been present since 2010, urban violence (UV) programs are not designed to address the root causes of violence but to turn violence into a manageable risk. In other words, their purpose is not to eradicate violence but rather to make it a liveable condition (Billaud 2020). The main method used for achieving this objective is "confidential dialogue" with weapon bearers, a method grounded on the belief that protection of vulnerable populations can be achieved if parties to a conflict are sensitised to international norms related to the use of force.

From 2010 to 2015, ICRC delegates worked in close collaboration with Maguadoran Red Cross volunteers in six "priority zones", i.e six *comunas* which had the highest homicide rates in the city. The project aimed at preventing armed violence and mitigating its direct and indirect consequences as well as reducing communities' vulnerability to violence by strengthening their resilience and facilitating their access to public services (health and education). Taking inspiration from a similar program implemented in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, the program followed a multidisciplinary approach. Activities consisted in a combination of protection dialogue with law enforcement authorities and gangs, assistance in the field of health and economic security as well as education

(emergency preparedness training and violence prevention education in schools, reinsertion activities in detention centres for minors). Dialogue with armed actors required, like in situations of armed conflict, direct, confidential and regular face-to-face meetings with them in the hope that such conversations would lead to behaviour change. The mere presence of ICRC delegates in the *barrios* was believed to have a calming effect on the surrounding environment.

Delegates working for the project during this period shared with me vivid memories of their networking methods. They explained how they managed to reach *combos*' chiefs and cartels' leaders thanks to the relationships of trust they were able to build with gang members detained in the prisons they visited. Using snow-balling strategies similar to those of social scientists as well as methods of participant-observation comparable to the "street corner ethnography" developed by the Chicago School of urban sociology, delegates capitalised on information collected in prisons and in the barrios to gradually move up *combos*' pyramidal organisational structure. Their patience and temerity were constantly tested as *combos* sought to evaluate their trust-worthiness. "Words of mouth, personal relationships and reputation were of key importance. People accepted to speak to me because they knew me personally, not because I worked for the ICRC. They saw me regularly in the *barrios*. They knew where I lived. They had information on my family. I knew I was under their close watch but that was the price to pay to be accepted", a delegate who had worked at the beginning of the UV project in San Sombrero told me.

To complement emergency-preparedness and violence-prevention trainings carried out in schools and places of detention, assistance was provided to specific categories of "victims". Priority was given to those who were wounded, either physically or psychologically, sexual violence survivors, minors enrolled in *combos*' activities, and those who were denied access to essential services, had been forcibly displaced or whose relatives had disappeared. These selection criteria remained largely similar to those applied in more classic ICRC operational contexts. Assistance was therefore not considered as a means to address structural violence (Farmer 2009) through poverty alleviation (even though it

clearly contributed to this goal) but rather as a form of compensation to victims of armed violence as well as a means to build trust with communities and initiate dialogue on protection issues.

Accountability trust and community-based protection

In 2015, at the end of this five-year program, the ICRC struggled to find a renewed position of relevance in San Sombrero. The decrease of homicides as a result of a truce between the two main competing *combos*, the reduction of financial and human resources and the reconfiguration of institutional priorities following the Peace Accord between the armed rebellion and the Maguadoran government, led the ICRC to reconsider the set-up of its program.

Its geographic approach based on the regular presence of delegates in "priority zones" was abandoned in favour of a thematic one focusing on urgent protection issues such as sexual violence, minors' recruitment, forced disappearances and the use of force. If this method was partially justified by long periods of relative calm in some *barrios*, it simultaneously made the ICRC lose essential contacts with gangs as well as its operational anchorage in the *barrios*.

This increased distance between delegates and "victims" (such as sexual violence survivors or families of the disappeared) deeply transformed their relationship. Having to travel to the ICRC office in the city centre to receive support – in contrast to the first period of the UV project when delegates were regularly present in the barrios – victims were now confronted by a bureaucracy in charge of handling their case. Such tasks involved redirecting clients to responsible public services and entering details of each "case" in the "protection database" for future follow-up. Demands for 'evidence-based' humanitarian action required a more systematic approach to data management and contributed to an inflation of administrative tasks in protection teams' everyday work. The intensive labour

involved in maintaining up-to-date the database so as to be able to derive trends and statistics used for reporting to donors was symptomatic of the bureaucratization of delegates' profession. It also indicated a shift in the way the organisation conceived its role as 'guardian of the Geneva Conventions', moving away from its original direct witness status in conflict zones to embrace a more technocratic approach to 'civilised wars' where 'humanity' is measured according to quantifiable benchmarks.

> *This increased distance between delegates and "victims" (such as sexual violence survivors or families of the disappeared) deeply transformed their relationship.*

In the *comunas*, communities were made responsible for their own protection through resilience-building activities. This approach responded to external calls for greater "accountability toward affected populations" whereby affected people were no longer considered as mere beneficiaries or victims, but also as "agents in their own protection" (ICRC 2016). To meet this requirement, the ICRC partnered with the Maguadoran Red Cross to empower the youth in schools and detention centres to find alternatives to violence using a methodology meant to achieve 'peace and coexistence', internally called *la metodologia*. As explained in a public communication, the purpose of the program was:

…. for young people to learn about different life alternatives, to highlight other ways of seeking solutions to conflicts, which include respect for life, the importance of listening to others, respect for human dignity and teamwork; (the program taught the youth to) value themselves as people and (sought to make them) understand that not everything revolves around money but that there are other essential things in daily life such as love, respect, companionship, solidarity and friendship.

By teaching young people "different values" such as "peace, friendship, love", the program implicitly assumed that such morals lacked in poor communities, hence reproducing the very stereotypes that contributed to their stigmatisation and that

justified violent state policing in the *barrios*. The methodology overlooked the various forms of structural inequalities responsible for the everyday violence that dominates in San Sombrero's poor neighbourhoods. Far from being a neutral, technical and pragmatic answer to identified 'needs', *la metodologia* represented a distinct mode of governing, part of an advanced liberal political project emphasising the need for certain groups to improve themselves through self-management (Ilcan and Lacey 2006). The principle of "accountability to affected populations" was operationalized through "self-help" programs whereby *barrios* inhabitants were trained in the art of "self-protection" and violence was turned into an object of management.

In a situation where armed violence had become a chronic problem, the ICRC's intervention remained minimalist not only in the biopolitical sense of "maintaining life on the threshold" but in the sense of "acting to preserve life at a distance" (Silva Rocha Lima Forthcoming). Ironically, the managerial techniques mobilised to ensure "accountability to affected populations" and therefore their "trust in humanitarian action" – to use the title of the 33rd Red Cross conference mentioned at the beginning of this essay – involved keeping them at a distance while turning them into self-disciplined individuals able to manage their own safety.

The humanitarian techniques of trust I have described in this essay (mandate-based, operational and accountability-based), far from being mutually exclusive, are rather complementary and used strategically by ICRC employees depending on circumstances and interlocutors. Yet, the bureaucratization processes triggered by the growing valency of accountability-trust has forced the organisation to prioritise and structure its work differently, making face-to-face interactions 'in the field' between delegates and beneficiaries less regular. Such an example highlights the paradox of technocratic mechanisms established to ensure organisational transparency where corporate moral responsibility is asserted through the production of experience-distant forms of knowledge perceived as more robust and objective. Surprisingly, the institutionalisation of trust through systematic reporting impedes on the establishment of the human-to-

human relations of care from which humanitarian action originally derived its ethical legitimacy.

[1] Names of countries and cities where these observations have been carried out have been fictionalised in order to honour the confidentiality requirements of the ICRC.

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Featured image by Matteo Catanese.

Global health meets sugar capitalism

Cal Biruk
November, 2022

Cal Biruk explores how technologies of audit and claims to transparency common to both agri-capitalist and global health infrastructures in Malawi paradoxically proliferate suspicion. They call for rethinking (mis)trust as embedded in postcolonial spatiotemporal and infrastructural orders.

After a long drive, Sheila and I arrive at the gates of a sprawling fifty-one square

mile Malawian sugar plantation that belongs to Africa's largest sugar company. An armed guard greets us and inquires about our purposes for entering the plantation. We explain we are affiliated with an NGO in the capital, have booked lodging inside the gates, and will be leading a workshop for local health care providers in a rented conference room at the company golf club across the street tomorrow. He nods, checks our documents, and asks us to step out of our car. He rifles through flipcharts, folders, and markers stuffed into the trunk, and opens a cardboard box containing hundreds of condoms and small bottles of water-based lubricant to be distributed to men who have sex with men (MSM) living in the district. After running a mirror over the undercarriage of the car to check for explosives, he allows us to pass.

We are on the plantation in the name of global health: Sheila is a Malawian employee of an NGO whose primary focus is outreach, research, and advocacy with sexual minorities in Malawi, and I am an anthropologist-collaborator with the NGO. We arrived to the plantation that day by surprise (neither of us realized our reserved lodging was *inside* the plantation), but the NGO has returned numerous times to conduct donor-funded workshops targeting district health care providers and MSM in the district. On this visit, health care providers are trained to increase their capacity to treat MSM without stigma. The Global Fund, the world's largest funder of global health programs, has prioritized key populations (MSM, transgender persons, incarcerated persons, sex workers, and IDUs) who face elevated HIV-risk and lack access to health services in their effort to 'end AIDS.'

After arriving at the lodge, we head to the bar to eat dinner and edit the slides for tomorrow. A group of men in company-branded polo shirts play billiards and sip whiskey. The server is chatty; glancing at our laptops, he tells us, "They [the workers] won't tell you the truth. They are afraid of losing their jobs." He mistakes us for auditors charged with doing impact assessments of sugar mill operations, belying awareness of a damning 2015 report that claimed the sugar company was evicting farmers to garner more land and raised concerns about workers' conditions. His words index the intimate enclosure that characterizes

plantation life: Housing, healthcare, and education for children are provided (to permanent employees, if not to a large contracted seasonal labour force) within the grounds. The sugar company anxiously surveils its domain, installing community policing units, patrols and roadblocks to mitigate theft of sugar cane and equipment, and prevent setting of malicious fires that destroy cane; the golf course, too, is surrounded by an electric fence. The productivity of workers who make Malawi one of the 'lowest cost' sugar-producing regions in the world, is closely monitored; cane-cutters who fail to meet daily targets may not receive their daily wage (Dubb et al 2017:465, Kiezebrink et al 2015:19-20). Technologies of surveillance bely an investment in ensuring maximal annual yield of sugar cane, typically around two million tons.

> *Instead, I suggest that mistrust and suspicion—and the idioms, (conspiracy) theories, and practices they generate—are fundamentally entangled with political economic histories and geographies of imperialism muted by technologies and rhetoric that make claims to transparency and truth.*

The next day, surrounded by health care providers, I am struck by the tall sugar cane stands just outside the conference room. A sour odour—by-product of ethanol production from molasses—wafts through the door. These sensory experiences registered the coincidence of sugar capitalism and global health in space and time, prompting me to juxtapose relations and logics of labour, suspicion, value, surveillance, audit, and performed benevolence characteristic of plantation and (global health) aid economies. This is not to draw a crude analogy between the plantation and global health. Instead, I suggest that mistrust and suspicion—and the idioms, (conspiracy) theories, and practices they generate—are fundamentally entangled with political economic histories and geographies of imperialism muted by technologies and rhetoric that make claims to transparency and truth. Underpinning mistrust between, say global health researchers and target populations or plantation supervisors and workers, are longstanding racialized relations of allocation and appropriation (Stoler 2016:347) rendered oblique by framings of mistrust as a problem of 'culture,'

misunderstanding, or interpersonal strife. Hierarchies and inequalities that foment suspicion and mistrust are embedded in spatiotemporal orders, especially distinctively postcolonial ones like 'the plantation' and 'global health.' In what follows, I intersperse vignettes and discourse analysis, tacking between the plantation and global health to demonstrate how trust/mistrust and transparency/opacity emerge in two postcolonial space-times that, for me, briefly collided.

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Sheila and I sit at a table in the conference room with thick manila envelopes stuffed with Malawian *kwacha* notes (money) in front of us, jokingly referring to ourselves as 'bankers.' Workshop participants line up as we meticulously count out their per diems and prepare the 'sign-in sheet', a compulsory piece of paperwork for donors who insist on documentation that proves that a 'real' person—represented by their signature and mobile phone number—received the money. As always, participants complain about the inadequacy of the per diem amount. Employed in the name of transparency, ritualized technologies of audit common to global health worlds nonetheless generate suspicion, anxiety, ill-will, and mistrust. Elsewhere, I have documented how MSM who attend workshops or trainings accuse some among them of being 'fake gays,' (even as they appear as 'real (enumerated) gays' on audit sheets) or faking a marginalized sexual identity to 'steal' coveted perdiems not meant for them (Biruk 2020). Such suspicions reflect how, "key words such as transparency, conveying notions of trust, openness, and fairness…dance endlessly across the same terrain as vernacular key words expressing suspicion, hiddenness, and treachery" (Sanders and West 2003:12).

Sitting at the table as a (white) 'banker,' in such close proximity to a 'members only' country club and cane stands directed my attention to how the exploitations and transactions the plantation has witnessed over time denote the accumulated palimpsest of uneven relations captured in this place, relations that flexibly shift with different material and discursive turns but remain anchored in the racialized

distribution of harms, benefits, health, and sickness. The coincidence of workshops and a plantation reveals that global health is entwined in landscapes and social ecologies that do not fall solely under the sign of the primary sites in which its projects are thought to play out (NGOs, clinics, clinical trials, etc…). A small shift in anthropological gaze—away from the immediate proceedings of a workshop and toward the plantation infrastructure just outside the conference room—invites new lines of thought. The sour odour that wafts into the conference room draws attention to the seams where two seemingly distinct infrastructures and economies touch (Vertesi 2014). The NGO's need for a conference room large enough to host its workshops that is centrally located within the district makes the plantation, whose imposing infrastructure seems out of place amid an otherwise impoverished landscape, a logical host. The infrastructure of sugar capitalism becomes terrain on which global health work plays out.

In quarterly reports sent back to donors, the NGO quantifies its successes using indicators like number of MSM HIV-tested or number of health care providers trained. The sign-in sheet above is collated with hundreds of others to furnish donors with proof of 'return on investment'. In a section titled "Advocacy/ Stakeholder Engagement" in its 2019 Annual Report, meanwhile, the sugar company, Illovo (2019), touted its contributions to national public health goals. Mimicking the aesthetics and language of global health reports, an infographic depicts that two million people were 'reached' in 2016/17 through a Vitamin A sugar fortification programme (Illovo 2017:34), which, according to marketing materials, brings consumers *mphamvu* [strength or vigour]. Vitamin A nutritional deficiency, a leading cause of childhood blindness and a contributor to all-cause mortality, has been a concern since the colonial period. The 2019 installation of vitamin A dosing plants at Illovo's sugar factory was widely praised in national media, shoring up the industry's claim to social responsibility; as Dubb et al (2017:465) argue in their analysis of the political economy of sugar, South African investments in sugar in the region are entwined with development aid and state politics alike. In Malawi, for example, a company that owns 2000 hectares of land leased to Illovo for cane production, provides technical support to international

donors implementing community development projects that target small farmers displaced by sugar companies (IRIN 2012, Chinsinga 2017).

The sugar fortification programme is a collaboration between Illovo, the government, NGOs, and UN agencies, blurring lines between global health, development, and sugar capitalism. Plantations have long been a convenient laboratory for experiments to optimize and tinker with life, labour, and ecologies in the name of health or improvement. Plantation-run clinics for employees and community members are frequent sites of global health research and interventions, including malaria research, clinical trials, and AIDS-related population size estimates. Global health projects seep into the plantation and utilize its infrastructures to access a captive experimental population. Vitamin A fortified sugar is an apt metaphor for global health, whereby certain conditions (nutritional deficiency) are narrowly targeted by interventions (sugar fortification), while others (land grabbing, occupational and environmental health risks for workers) are overlooked, echoing the narrow presumptions of 'life' inherent in the oft-repeated mandate to save lives that dominates global health rhetoric.

> *These rhythms—where 'projects' (and their funds) come and go and seasonal work is not guaranteed from one year to the next, respectively—generate uncertainty, doubt, suspicion, and insecurity, even as annual reports or publications produce convincing 'truths' of social responsibility, success, and health.*

In the early 2000s, shortly after Illovo took control of the plantation from a government sugar authority, they closed down a crocodile ranching project whereby hot wastewater from the factory was used to warm hatchlings whose skins were exported to Italy. Local communities experienced an uptick in "marauding crocodile" attacks and accused Illovo of letting the crocodiles loose, perhaps to push people off land that could be used for sugar cultivation. This charge, which Illovo dismissed, reflects a legacy of forced removal of residents

and land-grabbing in the interest of transforming customary land into sugarcane cultivation areas (Bae 2019). Crocodiles—implicated in famous stories of Malawi's post-independence president Hastings Kamuzu Banda throwing political dissidents into their jaws—become nefarious agents in the service of sugar capitalism, which tethers communities to a corporate giant for their livelihood.

Malawians caught up in global health worlds, too, mobilize idioms of 'eating,' theft, and vampires to critique what are seen as bloodthirsty practices. I documented accusations levelled by rural research participants against global health research projects, who contended that 1kg bags of (Illovo) sugar given as gifts were laced with 'poison' and accused research teams of being bloodsuckers (Biruk 2017). Bloodsuckers stories are a transhistorical genre that demonizes dangerous others, including colonial officials, firemen, physicians, politicians, and researchers. Registers of faking, bloodsucking, poisoning, crocodiles, eating, and stealing cue the unpredictable and unreliable rhythms of both global health and sugar economies. These rhythms—where 'projects' (and their funds) come and go and seasonal work is not guaranteed from one year to the next, respectively—generate uncertainty, doubt, suspicion, and insecurity, even as annual reports or publications produce convincing 'truths' of social responsibility, success, and health. Mistrust is often discussed as a psychological state or attitude, rendered as interpersonal phenomenon, or attributed to misunderstandings. Yet, suspicion and mistrust are situated in and constituted by material, historical, and infrastructural realities of displacement, extraction, and theft.

The plantation initially appears tangential to the anthropologist's work, outside the 'field' or beyond the bounds of their object of study (global health). On a break from the workshops, I wander around the country club, admiring tropical plants and manicured lawns. I come across an abandoned tennis court with weeds pushing up through cracks. No one has played a round of tennis here in a long time. I feel an eerie presence, a ghost pulling at my imagination, gesturing at histories that have unfolded in this place and urging me to think through the message this patch of tarmac, laid in the name of racialized leisure, is sending

me. I interpret this haunting as an invitation to excavate the material-semiotics of layered postcolonial entanglements, here between sugar capitalism and global health, laden with suspicion and mistrust.

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Featured image by Monika Grabkowska

Trust the organic?!

Danilo Borghi Gonçalves Pinto
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This short essay addresses how trust mechanisms are articulated in one of Geneva's local organic stores, considering the existence of trust relationships between human and non-human elements that make up the system studied: i) farmers/shopkeepers ii) consumers iii) organic labels.

According to the latest report released by Switzerland's main organic certification agency (BioSuisse), the country currently holds the world's largest numbers in

organic consumption per resident. In the report, BioSuisse also stated an impressive growth of nearly 20% in the influx of organic products in the country in 2020. A key element enabling the growth of this agri-food system is the customers' trust that such products have in fact been produced following strict production protocols. The main trust-building mechanism in this field are the organic labels, such as BioSuisse, which certify that the production process has been properly audited. Unlike mainstream supermarkets, local markets seem to foment, to a larger extent, a type of customer trust generated by interpersonal relationships arising from their proximity and familiarity with sellers who guarantee the organic origins of their products. In such spaces, customer trust finds more favourable ground to be based on human relations rather than solely on organic labels, in a context in which communication practices play an important role.

> *Local markets seem to foment a type of customer trust generated by interpersonal relationships arising from their proximity and familiarity with sellers.*

Classic authors of sociology of trust such as Georg Simmel and Niklas Luhmann conceptualised trust from a functionalist perspective, showing trust as a central element for the maintenance of social order. Following this functionalist path, Anthony Giddens (1987) has shown that in modernity interpersonal trust has migrated to trust in systems. In organic agriculture, trust in the farmer migrated to trust in the auditing certification system. This migration pointed out by Giddens can also be associated with the studies of Theodore Porter (1995), who, when analysing the growth of quantitative methods, standardisation processes and the creation of impersonal objective rules, developed the concept of "mechanical objectivity". Along these lines, Pentland (1993) showed that auditing rituals offer a sense of comfort and security, generating trust in the same functional perspective as Luhmann (2017) and reinforcing Porter's ideas. Following the vision of standardisation and mechanical objectivity, Raynolds (2004) highlighted the central role of auditing and certification systems for the

maintenance of the world trade in the organic sector. She also argues that the values of the organic movement – based on a more interpersonal trust and on interpersonal relationships – were also thriving through alternative organic retail arrangements and a growing consumer consciousness.

This conceptual dichotomy of trust (personal vs. impersonal) present in the organic market is addressed here in relation to the "Ferme de Budé", which is a 0.7 ha urban organic farm located in the neighbourhood of Petit-Saconnex, Geneva. All production, certified by BioSuisse, is sold at their *local store* that attracts an average of 1000 clients per week. As the farm's production does not meet the client demand both in terms of quantity and variety, they also sell a range of organic products with priority to local, regional, national and international products, in this order. Their motto *"Priorité au local, priorité au bio"* synthesises their shared values in relation to food commercialisation and consumption practices. In this sense, the Ferme de Budé presents itself as a rich environment for understanding how mechanisms of trust are articulated within the growing organic scene of Geneva.

The presence of interpersonal relationships and its link to creating consumer trust is something that stands out in this specific setting, by contrast to mainstream supermarkets that work on a rather impersonal basis in which the organic labels are usually the only trust-building element in place. Issues concerning the relationship between the farm and its clients came up in informal conversations as well as in interviews with interlocutors from both groups. For local store "collaborators" – as workers call themselves – a good portion of their clients is frequently "picky" and "rigid" in choosing what to buy. This strict demand from customers normally involves the origin of products, as most of the clients go there to purchase local organic food. When some food items are not from Geneva or Switzerland, clients usually demand explanations to the market staff as to why the Ferme de Budé opted to sell those products over local ones.

These constant demands for justification and explanations posed by the customers have led the Ferme de Budé to be extra careful when selecting products for sale.

Much of the relationship of trust between clients and the Ferme de Budé store workers is built up through such dialogs involving clients' demands. In this sense, not only are the demands and the seller's response to them key aspects in trust-building, the communication practices in which such demands are made are also a central element for customer trust. The everyday commitment – which is constantly at stake – of the farm to commercialise high quality products makes the foundation for a relationship of trust based on interpersonal relations in which direct dialogues with clients are central. Although consumer trust is generally posed on the farm as an enterprise, it can also be seen as an interpersonal type of relationship as the few workers of the store are the main responsible for nourishing these relationships on the farm's side, on a daily basis, with an array of clients.

The store ambience is indeed permeated by short conversations between customers and staff on available/non-available products, their specificities as well as suggestions and demands from customers. When a client comes for the first time, she/he is usually welcomed with a brief tour explaining the sections of the market and how it is also organised in terms of information concerning the origin of products. Such practices indeed contribute for a client/seller relationship that seems to be very much valued by both sides and deeply contributes to consumer trust. In this context, communication practices are the foundation element for interpersonal trust-building between organic consumers and sellers.

Luhmann's (2017) point regarding familiarity being a precondition for trust was seen in dialogues with the Ferme de Budé's workers but mainly in interviews conducted with clients. The relationship they have had with store collaborators seem to be an important factor for their trust on the quality of the products sold at the market. As interviews explored the issue between trust in labels and interpersonal trust, answers from regular customers expressing their trust on the Ferme de Budé and their collaborators were unanimous. For example, when asked if the Ferme de Budé's products did not have a certified organic label they would still buy them *believing* they are organic if the farm informed the clients so, all answers were "yes". Furthermore, most respondents spontaneously raised the

issue of trust – even though the word trust itself was not mentioned in the question. In what follows, I quote a few answers from different customers: (Consumer 1) *Yes, because for me it's a matter of trust. I trust them, so yes"*; (Consumer 2) *"Probably yes. I trust them because we have a relationship with them. Even if the lady at the cashier of COOP [a large Swiss supermarket chain] knows me too, here we do exchange [and at COOP we do not]"*; (Consumer 3) *"Yes, well, I've bought food several times here and it's usually very good, it has a good taste, so I trust this farm"*; (Consumer 4) *Yes, I would. I'm not saying the label is not important, it's just about confidence"*; (Consumer 5) *"Yes, I trust them […] there should be more places like this"*. These excerpts reveal the importance of clients' "relationship" and "exchange" with the Ferme de Budé collaborators in their sense of "trust" and "confidence" on the sellers – and consequently on the organic products sold at the farm's store.

Overall, customers interviewed did not seem to place a great importance on organic labels with respect to the products produced by the Ferme de Budé, stating that they trust the farm and know that no pesticides are used in their agricultural production. However, from the perspective of the Ferme de Budé, the organic labels – especially BioSuisse – seem to be important especially for customers who are not local residents and frequent clients (and therefore do not know the way the farm works, their values, etc.). As only local consumers – with whom stronger relationships of trust are built – would not allow for the economic sustainability of the Ferme de Budé's store, labels also play an important role in generating consumer trust. Thence, a dual trust-generating mechanism is observed, forming a scenario in which one seems to strengthen the other considering the different types of clients involved. Consumer trust is, therefore, on the one hand, anchored in specific interpersonal relationships between sellers and regular customers and, on the other, fully delegated to organic labels to generate trust especially within the group of non-regular and non-local clients who are less familiar with the farm's workers and their shared values on agriculture and food affairs. In this sense, the "exchanges" and "relationships" established through continuous communication practices with regular customers

generate a kind of trust which considerably differs to the audit-based semiotic practice and function of organic labels. As far as Ferme de Budé is concerned, both mechanisms of trust are complementary and mutually important for the financial sustainability of the store.

> *The "exchanges" and "relationships" established through continuous communication practices with regular customers generate a kind of trust which considerably differs to the audit-based semiotic practice and function of organic labels.*

According to an interlocutor who has been closely involved in the BioSuisse organic certification processes of the farm in the past years, the only viable way to discontinue their organic certification would be the implementation of structures of Community Support Agriculture (CSA), which would guarantee an anticipated sale of all production and whose proximity to clients would potentially nullify the necessity for organic labels. This person, however, does not see this happening with the Ferme de Budé, as for her the farm is embedded in a different commercial context.

This "different commercial context" in which organic labels are necessary were indeed common perceptions during the short fieldwork conducted for this study, reinforcing the view that both types of trust are important for the sustainability of the local business. Ferme de Budé interlocutors believe that the BioSuisse organic label goes beyond a label placed on a fruit or vegetable to generate consumer trust. Although this factor is certainly important, it is strategic for Ferme de Budé to belong to the "BioSuisse network", as it brings local businesses the prestige of the BioSuisse brand. In addition to acquiring varied materials for the commercialisation of BioSuisse products that are useful to the local store, the Ferme de Budé also gains the opportunity to have a closer contact with other BioSuisse producers of the region that are relevant for their local network of partners.

This short essay briefly discussed, in the context of a local organic store and

urban farm located close to Geneva’s city centre, the articulation of mechanisms of trust based on systems or mechanical objectivity (organic labels) and on more subjective elements anchored in interpersonal relationships and familiarity. In the Ferme de Budé, the two trust-generating mechanisms identified function in an integrated manner, assuming different objectives to keep the business going – not only in relation to financial stability but also to the values of the farm’s “collaborators”. The organic labels, most of all BioSuisse, have an importance to the farm that goes beyond the sole certification of organic products to generate trust in clients, as this renowned national label integrates the farm in a system of other organic farms that is beneficial to the Ferme de Budé as an enterprise. Although they hold values that connect them to a more grassroots organic movement, they still find themselves embedded (and acknowledge its importance) in a network of mainstream national organic agriculture. Nevertheless, much of the trust by clients on their products does not rely much on the organic labels per se, as it is built, to a great extent, on the relationship of proximity they have developed with the farm and its store collaborators that differs substantially from mainstream supermarket chains.

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"Is it really organic?"

Shaila Seshia Galvin
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Spurred by a question I have been commonly asked, yet one that I've long neglected as ethnographically revealing in itself, this essay takes queries about organic farming and its certification as a window to probe the relations of truth and trust.

Ethnographic moments spark curiosity and puzzlement, spur the search for new understanding, and are almost always seen to be some of the most generative parts of anthropological fieldwork. Despite best efforts to trouble distinctions between "field" and "home" it remains rare that the milieu where academic research is presented after the fieldwork is completed—workshops, seminars, and conferences—are considered to be sites that are ethnographically potent in themselves. Over the course of a number of years thinking and writing about

trust, transparency and organic certification (Galvin 2018), I have come to appreciate how these milieus are equally worthy of ethnographic attention, generative for inquiry into the play of trust and doubt, transparency and unknowability, as the basmati fields of northern India where I conducted my research.

Among the questions I am most often asked when I present my work in classes or conferences, seminars or workshops, usually after a formal Q&A has ended, goes something like: "so, were these farmers *really* organic?" My internal reaction to this question has long been a combination of unease and dismay, for I construe the purpose of my research not to assess and evaluate farmers (as would a certification inspector) but to try to better understand how the quality of becoming, and being, organic is assembled in the first place. Over time, I came to see this question as ethnographically significant in its own right, for it too says something about how the contours and relations of truth, transparency, trust and mistrust are fashioned. To ask whether farmers are "really organic" presupposes not only that there is something that organic really is which can be discovered and adjudicated, but also conveys a certain suspicion of smallholder farmers and, by extension, of organic itself.

Organic certification participates in discourses of trust, and its commodification. While certification is often touted as necessary to produce public trust in organic quality, it often manifests as a commitment to transparency, requiring farmers, producers, and processors to make their work visible and legible through documentation, inspections, and sometimes also routine residue testing. This impetus to transparency, as well as relations of trust among those who participate in certification processes, are conditioned by one fundamental feature of organic agriculture: that *organic*, as a characteristic of land or its produce, does not manifest in any readily knowable, tangible or physical way (Galvin 2021).

> *Traceability is an important aspect of the kind of transparency sought in many supply chains.*

In Uttarakhand’s Doon Valley, *organic* is not a quality inherent in basmati, but one that comes to be conferred on it through the land where it is cultivated, the processes of its production, as well as the methods of storing, transporting and processing it after harvest. It is thus necessary to track basmati as it is harvested, stored, transported, processed and packaged. Traceability, indeed, is an important aspect of the kind of transparency sought in many supply chains, and one that organic certification processes also seek to establish.

“Transparency, as it is used in contemporary global-speak” West and Sanders write, “presumes a *surface* to power that can be seen through and an *interior* that can, as a result, be seen.” (West and Sanders 2003: 16) Transparency, in this “global-speak”, is endowed with revelatory power, affording access to and knowledge of what otherwise remains hidden. The ability of instruments of transparency to (appear to) cut through the surface of power is clearly displayed in the logics that underlie audit cultures. In her analysis of a USDA program introduced in the wake of an *E. coli* outbreak which requires meatpackers to develop internal audit procedures, Dunn writes that audits “purport to have a one-to-one correspondence with what actually goes on in a firm or an organisation, thereby granting the auditors (and, by proxy, those who trust the auditors) the ability to look into the firm and see what actually happens there.” (2007, 42) Dunn, however, goes to argue that “these representations are clearly only simplified models of what actually takes place…They efface the social negotiations that take place between auditors and the people they audit before the ‘facts’ are written down.”(ibid.; see also Cavanaugh 2016).

> *Certification processes entailed more than simply verifying compliance; in some instances they required leaps of faith.*

Similarly, organic certification processes themselves brought into relief many dilemmas and disjunctures that were unavoidable and inescapable when the ideal of organic espoused in regulatory frameworks encountered its everyday practice in the Doon Valley: certified organic seeds were not always available, small and

fragmented landholdings meant that buffer zones could not be defined in purely spatial terms, records were not always routinely kept. Certification processes therefore entailed more than simply verifying compliance; in some instances they required leaps of faith. They called on inspectors to bound the limits (and limitations) of transparency, filling in gaps which inevitably emerged in a system premised on assumptions of total knowledge and oversight, patching up holes of unknowability by conjuring trust when faced with circumstances of great uncertainty. They worked, in this way, to produce cohesive narratives of organic agriculture that smoothed over the everyday challenges, complexities and negotiations that were an inevitable part of organic production, yielding *organic* as a quality with truth status.

The revelatory work that transparency projects such as certification claim to do arguably connects them with wider practices of truth telling and, arguably, of truth making. In this regard, such projects (including organic certification) might be considered emblematic of what Foucault described as “the will to truth.” (Foucault 1980: 66) Truth, he writes, is a “thing of this world…Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics of truth.” (1980: 131) If oracular truths are spoken or divined (Evans-Pritchard 1937, see also Holbraad 2012), certification is conventionally seen as a medium for revealing truth through documents, inspections, and sometimes also residue testing. Regimes of truth necessarily operate in a range of ways that themselves shift over time; they are, as Foucault emphasises, inseparable from power. Along these lines, Fassin and d’Halluin (2005) describe how in a context of growing suspicion around asylum claims in France in the late twentieth century, medical certificates became increasingly necessary for determining the validity of asylum petitions. Forensic testing offers still another example of the ways in which regimes of truth work through claims to transparency; in criminal trials DNA samples are seen to work as a “truth machine.” (Lynch 2008)

Organic agriculture and its certification in Uttarakhand may appear to be a far cry from asylum interviews and criminal trials, but parallels nonetheless exist insofar as documents and, more recently, forensic sampling in the form of the

routine testing of grains for prohibited residues, are regarded as indispensable "proof" of organic status. The revelatory power ascribed to these practices and technologies, and their presumed ability to show things as they really are, are deployed in emergent agrarian truth regimes founded on ever-expanding forms of monitoring, inspection, and surveillance.

When it comes to the question, "is it really organic?" we can ask instead how it is that certification produces organic (or anything else) as truth in the first place. This might lead us to see the relation of truth and trust differently (see Carey 2017).. Sentiments and relations of public trust are often assumed to be dependent on truth and verifiability: the truth revealed by the outcome of a residue test or an inspection is the foundation on which trust in the integrity of organic quality rests. But, could it also be that relations are constituted the other way around, as leaps of faith—produced in assemblages of documents, inspections, audits, surveillance, testing regimes—also become the stuff of which truths are made?

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Technologies of Trust put to the Test

Isabella Hesse
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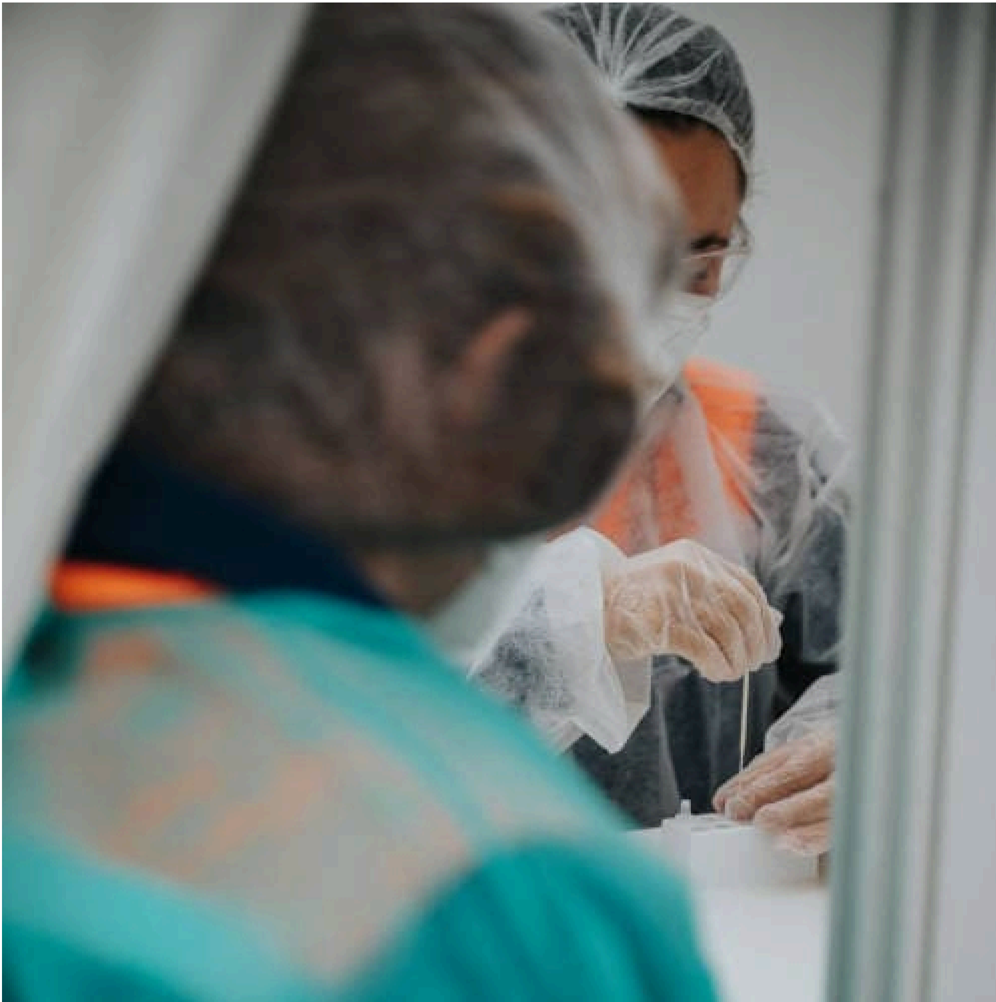

Drawing on participant observation of COVID-19 tests and blood donation, this article demonstrates how micro-interactions between medical personnel and laypeople can constitute trust, grounding the heavily debated topic ‚trust in medicine' in everyday life.

Trust is one of those buzzwords that rolls off the tongue and flits across magazine articles on relationship advice, that buzzes around your head like a mosquito when you're trying to concentrate. Difficult to place, to pin down and even more difficult to tune out. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, trust has been a favoured buzzword, as trustworthiness of fellow citizens, of government measures and medical advice has repeatedly been questioned. Medical institutions have been called upon to inform policy, medical concepts and technologies such as

herd immunity and PCR-tests have become prominent parts of our individual lives and interactions. This ethnographic essay is an attempt to capture the situational production of trust in interactions between medical personnel and laypeople, using the means of participant observation and reflexive ethnography (Ellis & Bochner 2000: 740f). By providing a specific empirical context, I aim to contribute to productive conversations on the slippery subject of trust.

During visits to a COVID-19 test site and a blood donation centre in Vienna in the spring of 2021, I came to conceive of trust as something produced through interactions: as something malleable, which waxes and wanes, rather than a binary opposition of absolute trust and absolute distrust. Sociologists and historians such as Niklas Luhmann or Steven Shapin have explained the function of trust as a fundamental social institution which reduces complexity in everyday life (Luhmann 2014, Shapin 1994). Trust allows us to depend on others, on the knowledge they have found, the technologies they have developed, the frameworks they have built. "We board a plane trusting it to get us safely to our destination not because we have familiarity with the design engineer or the pilot but because we trust that reliable *systems of expertise* were brought to bear in constructing the plane and will be devoted to flying it." (Shapin 1994: 15) Akin to the aeroplane passenger, I entered my field site with a baseline of trust in medical professionals and the Austrian health care system. Such trust will vary between individuals, which is exactly why I find it productive to examine trust-creation in specific interactions. Trust in systems, characterised by Anthony Giddens as a symptom of modern complexity, entails a more abstract social relationship than trust in persons (Giddens 1995: 88). However in the case of medicine, interpersonal and system trust are interrelated. A patient's trust in the nurse giving them an IV cannot be understood without the context of medicine as a science, as an institution, as a part of human history. But the nurse has some range of freedom, some choice as to how they behave. In this discretionary space it is up to the individual how they convey trustworthiness. Medicine as an institution can survive some of its individual representatives being untrustworthy or being distrusted, but it cannot function without any interpersonal trust at all.

> *A patient's trust in the nurse giving them an IV cannot be understood without the context of medicine as a science, as an institution, as a part of human history.*

COVID-19 tests are a procedure intended to create certainty. You enter as an uncertified, potentially contagious individual and leave either knowing you are ill and need to be quarantined, or with a certification of health and permission to mingle in public. Regularly testing as many people as possible can help to cut short chains of infection and slow the spread of the virus, which in turn prevents health care infrastructure from becoming overburdened. Making testing accessible benefits health care workers as well as the general population. The test centre in Vienna's Stadthalle seemed designed to process individuals as quickly and smoothly as possible. Stern instruction-signs – "Taking pictures is forbidden in the entire test area" – hung alongside friendly banners proclaiming: "Let's help together!" Disinfectant, scrubs, disposable protective body suits, gloves and the omnipresent FFP2 masks served the obvious purpose of preventing infection, but also helped to create the impression of a well-oiled machine. Well-known pop songs played over the sound system, interspersed with occasional reminders that FFP2 masks are mandatory. The people waiting in line would sometimes sway to the music, their minds taken off the tense wait for a result, or boring delay in their routine. At the blood donation centre, the clinical atmosphere was also dispersed by background music, and screens displaying a slideshow of "fun facts". After giving blood, visitors proceeded to a café-like room decorated with cheerful flowers where food and drink were available free of charge for recovering donors.

Throughout my observation I identified redundancy and routinization as key factors in creating a trustworthy setting. There was a learning curve to getting Covid-tested. While early visits were full of anxiety and confusion (about the swabbing procedure itself, about the consequences of testing positive…) after a few months, the process had become no more daunting than buying groceries. For the most part I could move through the test centre on autopilot, letting my mind wander. Once I had learned to interpret the test result myself, even the

waiting anxiety diminished. But ongoing slight changes in setting and routine could catch interactional partners off guard and generally undermine the trustworthiness of the setting. For instance, when the word “negative” on the paper result certificate was swapped out with “not detected”, I observed several people picking up their certificate, glancing at it and returning to ask the check-out personnel whether this meant that they had Covid or not.

What reads as trustworthy depends on context as much as the actions performed. In the test centre, which revolved around preventing infection, touch was to be avoided, distance was valuable, and friendliness extended to the phrasing of instructions and short courtesies like “Thank you” or “Have a nice day”. To some, relaxed chatting might even have seemed disconcerting or frustrating, as the goal was generally to move through each step of the testing process as quickly as possible. However, the staff at the blood donation clinic, when dealing with me as a vulnerable patient who had nearly passed out on them, showed professionalism in an entirely different way. Their humour and relaxation signalled that they had the situation under control, that there was nothing to fear. Distance would have been alienating, and small, comforting touches were reassuring. In either circumstance, trust hinged upon institutional guidelines but also micro-actions which were at the discretion of the individual.

> *For instance, when the word “negative” on the paper result certificate was swapped out with “not detected”, I observed several people picking up their certificate, glancing at it and returning to ask the check-out personnel whether this meant that they had Covid or not.*

Both medical settings I observed had redundancies built into them. Before blood donation, I was questioned in two separate doctors’ offices about various risk factors, (Had I recently left the country? Had I been ill?), had my blood pressure measured twice in a row and was asked by each new interactional partner to repeat my name and birthdate. Redundancies seemed to be working against a slip up by distributing decisions between multiple people, and sometimes non-human

actors, such as a blood pressure monitor. The latter actors are often assumed to be even more trustworthy, as they have no agenda of their own and do not lie (Weichselbraun 2019: 508).

My observation stints at the blood donation centre provided me with insights on the significance of transparency and autonomy. Patients have the right to autonomous decisions, however in medical practice this autonomy is frequently limited, because patients are reliant on expert knowledge and advice, or are incapable of formulating and communicating independent decisions (e.g. patients who are unconscious or incapacitated, small children). Doctor and medical ethicist Claudia Wiesemann presents trust as a solution to the problem of hampered autonomy. Viewing patients as trust-givers whose autonomy is to be taken seriously prevents paternalism. The patients' personhood is respected, decisions on their welfare are not made without them, even if their autonomy is limited (Wiesemann 2016).

The staff I interacted with at the donation centre often explained what they were doing, as they were doing it. Before donating, the doctors and nurses who measured temperature and blood pressure read the numbers out loud. After I experienced a circulatory collapse on my first visit I noticed, even though I was slightly dazed, that the staff talked *to* me as much as they talked *about* me. I got to lie down behind a screen to give me some privacy until I recovered. A doctor bent down to my eye-level to explain what medication they wanted to give me to stabilise my circulation. One of the staff showed thoughtfulness by putting the medication in a cup of sweet soda to mask the unpleasant taste. Reassuring me seemed nearly as important as getting me to drink fluids and getting my blood sugar up. Routinization and institutionalisation need not preclude personal connection, instead the "personal touch" forms part of what makes the institution trustworthy, and can become part of the routine for members of the institution.

However, this doesn't mean that the well-oiled machine never chokes. In literature on trust, a lack of trust is frequently classified as automatically negative, and a deficiency on the part of the person or parties who cannot bring

themselves to trust (Baier 1986: 231f). But in the case of historically marginalised populations, the pathology does not lie with the individual who cannot trust, it lies with the system that cannot earn trust. As evidenced by the current example of vaccine hesitancy, after centuries of systemic racism, exploitation and numerous cases of misconduct against Black patients, it is unsurprising that Black Americans are more likely to question the trustworthiness of a government recommendation to vaccinate (Warren et al. 2020: 121(1), Jamison et al. 2019: 90f).

> *Routinization and institutionalisation need not preclude personal connection, instead the "personal touch" forms part of what makes the institution trustworthy, and can become part of the routine for members of the institution.*

I believe that viewing system trust from the perspective of marginalised people can reveal where a system's failings lie. One thing to keep in mind about reflexive ethnography and using my own experiences as a means of gathering knowledge, is that what I learn is influenced by my position in society and what interactional partners know or assume about me. My blood pressure was compared to a baseline of what is considered normal for women who are roughly my age and weight. The pre-donation questionnaire specifically addresses women with questions on pregnancy and singles out sexual relations between men as indicators of unsuitability. When I started to feel weak after donating, I began interacting with the staff from a slightly different position, as a vulnerable patient, as someone who was temporarily restricted in her autonomy. But I was also addressed by the nurses specifically as a young woman, one of them joking that they'd get me back on my feet with "Womanpower", another assuming I had a male partner to come pick me up. Medical institutions categorise people for the purpose of efficiency. But an individual who does not fit the norm, for whatever reason, can be alienated or harmed by the standardised "one-size-fits-all" approach. This can range from minor inconveniences to very serious medical bias and neglect. For medical professionals seeking to increase trustworthiness amongst a wide variety of patients, it may be worthwhile to consider to what

extent their habitual interactions accommodate or exclude persons occupying a marginalised position in society. Even patients possessing a form of privilege or who appear to fit standardised expectations at first glance may be vulnerable in less obvious ways.

Almost a year after this fieldwork, the pandemic continues to haunt us. Debates on the trustworthiness of medicine as an institution, as well as on how government policy should draw on medical expertise, rage – or buzz – on. I hypothesise that what I observed on a micro-level can to some extent be applied to a macro-level. In the context of the pandemic, trust in medicine may be hurt by short-notice and untransparent changes, like the sudden alteration of the test certificate. In contrast, more transparency in decision-making processes which lead to restrictive safety measures could potentially help alleviate the discomfort caused by hampered autonomy. Nonetheless, throughout the variety of encounters I experienced, trust presented itself as more than a simple formula of action-reaction. What constituted a trustworthy action or environment was entwined with power relations, the roles I inhabited, how I perceived others and was perceived by them. What can comfort one person may alienate another. For interactional partners in medical settings, trust remains difficult to pin down.

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Seeing Is Not Believing

Adela Zhang
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This piece explores how the indexical quality of Facebook livestreams and the particular claims they make to represent or manifest "reality" connect with long-standing anxieties over accountability, transparency and trustworthiness in contexts of profound distrust and extreme socioeconomic inequality. Across Peru's southern Andes, peasant community leaders have taken to livestreaming roadblocks, marches, and corporate negotiations amidst the rapid transformation of their ancestral lands into one of the most lucrative and promising sites for large-scale, industrial mineral extraction in Latin America. Using digital anthropology methods, I trace how livestreams have emerged as a vibrant, albeit unstable, political form for cultivating trust in a political system that has historically failed to respond to the demands of the Andean communities that speak as el pueblo, or "the people."

“We bet on mining,” peasant leaders (*dirigentes*) say of the decision to permit one of the world’s largest open-pit copper mining projects on lands occupied by Quechua-speaking communities in Peru’s southern Andes some ten years ago. Although intermittent signs of nouveau wealth now glint amidst dusty mountains, the glaring absence of prosperity in these rural Andean communities suggests that the gamble on large-scale extraction is unlikely to pay off. “We have so much wealth; why do we continue to be poor?” Residents of peasant communities bemoan, caught between disbelief and disappointment. In the gap between intensive extraction and few palpable improvements in peasant quality of life, a pervasive sense of *desconfianza* (distrust) in local leaders has emerged. Rather than concluding that extraction cannot produce sustainable growth, the absence of the massive social development promised by the mine has instead made dirigentes into objects of intense suspicion and popular critique.

Much to the chagrin of many dirigentes, they, not the mining company, are held responsible for the mega-mine’s failure to produce appreciable forms of prosperity. The people’s defenders (*luchadores sociales*) thus find themselves confronting rumours that they are, in fact, the enemies of the people (*enemigos del pueblo*). It is in this context of profound desconfianza that Facebook livestreams appear as a promising technology of trust for dirigentes seeking to legitimize themselves, to justify their efforts to renegotiate the terms of mining activity, and to recuperate the population’s faith in them and their *lucha por el pueblo* (fight for the people). Using livestreams, dirigentes document community protests, negotiations with mining companies, and dialogue meetings with state authorities in real time. As one livestreaming dirigente explained: “If the people [*población*] can see what you are doing, if they know the *reality*, then how can you be doing anything wrong?”

This piece explores how technologies like Facebook livestreams intersect with seductive assumptions about the links between visibility, transparency, and accountability. It does so by examining the ambivalent effects of peasant leaders’

adoption of livestreams and the ways in which these recordings exceed dirigentes' efforts to direct how they are interpreted. Through social media, dirigentes aim to make their political labour more open, transparent, and visible, thus combatting accusations of corruption and (ideally) restoring popular trust in their advocacy for fellow peasants. But because livestreams operate under the proposition that "video…has a privileged access to objective truth" (Razsa 2014:507, paraphrasing Mazzarella 2004), they make "reality" a salient battleground *both* for those challenging large-scale extraction in Peru's southern Andes and those who support it. The documentarian quality of livestreams that draws in dirigentes is the very same which appeals to sceptics, who use the visuals and sound bites from these real-time videos as "proof" ("*medio probatorio*") about the "truth" behind dirigentes' political actions: that they are motivated by avarice and ignorance, and that their protests of mining activity are little more than extortion disguised as social struggle (Facebook comment, August 1, 2022).

During a two month-long protest in early 2022, dirigente livestreams from communities around the mine showed police launching dozens of tear gas canisters at community members armed with *warakas*, a kind of woven sling used to herd sheep and cows. As one dirigente explained in his livestream, "we [are] able to bear witness to the abuses of the National Police… it seems that the mining company is betting on repression of these peasant communities with which they have unfulfilled promises…[to] manag[e] these kinds of conflicts." Through tear gas, the dirigente went on:

We will continue to livestream…[so] that [our situation] may reach, first-hand, the entirety of our province, our region, our country, and internationally. We make an effort to livestream, to share [*colaborar con*] information so that you all may know first-hand [what is happening]…Social media is a joy and a possibility for us [because] it permits us to inform you all of what is really happening, first-hand…[Through livestreams we can] bring to you first-hand information from the very place where things are happening (Facebook, April 28, 2022).

In their voiceovers on these livestreams, dirigentes claim to reveal the mine's

“real” face: violent, intractable, and unconcerned with peasant well-being. This ability to speak authoritatively on behalf of peasant realities is rooted in livestreams’ indexical quality, the “grounds for viewers’ frequent belief that the image and sound of photographic, filmic and video recordings are simply the world presented directly, i.e. a direct and objective truth without mediation” (Razsa 2014:507, paraphrasing Mazzarella 2004). The livestream’s power thus lies in its apparent ability to transmit things as they “really are,” “first-hand,” in “the place where things are happening.” Under the auspices of unmediated access to “reality,” livestreams offer dirigentes the promise of being able to narrate and interpret reality in a way that shows the abuses of an extractive industry-military complex and which supports their demand to renegotiate the current terms of mining activity for more just conditions.

The livestream’s power thus lies in its apparent ability to transmit things as they “really are,” “first-hand,” in “the place where things are happening.”

In other words, dirigente editorializing seeks to seize control of the process through which the raw material of reality is transformed into some representation of what is “real.” Rather than oppose representations of reality to some objective reality “out there” in which the former is “false” and the latter is “true,” I view dirigente livestreams as narrations that operate under the sign of “reality.” Albeit subjective, their narrations disrupt other dominant narrative arcs that seek to conceal the violence and contradictions required to make large-scale mining activity possible and continually desirable. However, to the dismay of livestreaming dirigentes, “reality” operates like any other sign: open to contestation, interpretation, and re-signification, in ways that may be unexpected and disconcerting (see Goodwin 1994; Gal and Irvine 2019).

Facebook livestreams are especially vulnerable to practices that reroute meaning towards competing interpretations because comments made during the livestream appear on the screen in real-time, narrating the events taking place as they happen. Since anyone can comment on these livestreams, dirigentes have

virtually no control over how these (often anonymous) commenters narrate the livestream's "reality." Moreover, livestreams watched after they were originally streamed retain these comments as if they were subtitles on past events, in which "these comments form part of [the livestream as] a circulating visual document…[and] provide a pointed frame" for how future viewers should interpret what they see (Zhang, forthcoming).

> *To the dismay of livestreaming dirigentes, "reality" operates like any other sign: open to contestation, interpretation, and re-signification, in ways that may be unexpected and disconcerting (see Goodwin 1994; Gal and Irvine 2019).*

For instance, in one livestream of a meeting to negotiate the end of the two-month long protest which paralyzed the mine, various rolling comments claimed to know the truth behind dirigentes' motivations. Real-time commentary subtitled the livestream with claims like: "The reality is that the community members want money" and "Do you know[?] the reality is that these s[hits] want money, period" (Facebook, June 9, 2022). These comments drew on the dirigentes' own displayed behaviour in the livestreams to substantiate their claims, asserting that "This [dirigente and his community] is crazy for money. They have money and are businessmen [which makes] them think they are better than others. But if they were [really] poor they wouldn't act like this[,] petulant Because the poor are humble and speak [differently, using] pleas/supplication These [guys] have been [trained]" (ibid). Another scoffs in the rolling comments, "What nice phones these so-called ancestral peasants use" (ibid). Pointing out how dirigentes behave, look, and speak in these meetings as evidence that they are not who they say they are or that their motivations are distinct from the ones they manifest readily slips into accusations that their underlying opposition to the mine is also uncredible.

In a previous livestream of a press conference with the protesting communal leaders, someone wrote, "This is a band of cattle-rustlers and racketeers. The only thing [these dirigentes] are after is more money by extorting mining companies…They are only disguised [dressed up; "*disfrasados*"] as 'peasants'

[“*comuneros*”]” (Facebook, June 2, 2022). By using the very same videographic evidence of a reality that dirigentes believe will endorse their marches and strikes to instead “prove” that dirigentes are secretly motivated by “other interests…like greed,” these other claims to know “reality” generate further desconfianza, not just towards dirigentes but also to undercut the notion that opposition to extraction is even legitimate to begin with. Through Facebook livestreams, protests are re-signified by a mistrustful audience as extortion (*chantaje*): “These old guys [dirigentes] have discovered how to get money from the mine…[by] blocking it for any old bullshit [reason]” (ibid). Showing things “as they are” has turned out to be a dicey proposition as livestreams attract what dirigentes consider to be “trolls”: anonymous accounts that use a livestream’s rolling comment section to “*chancar*” (browbeat; critique; attack) and accuse peasant communities and their leaders of organizing roadblocks to extort the mining company for payoffs. The “reality” that livestreams threaten to reveal is therefore not, as dirigentes imagined, the exploitation and abuses of the mine, but the avarice and hypocrisy of dirigentes themselves.

“No, not anymore.” C, my collaborator and a dirigente, says wearily. He doesn’t want to livestream. More specifically, he doesn’t want to argue with other dirigentes about whether or not their next meeting with mine executives should be livestreamed. Seduced by the seemingly easy equivalence between the visibility that livestreams seemed to grant and the promise of making mining politics more transparent, I worked with a dozen dirigentes in the region who made cell phone livestreams of mining-related protests and negotiations to improve the audio-visual quality of their transmissions with better recording equipment. I did so without fully appreciating the ways in which desconfianza towards and among dirigentes was steadily suffusing their efforts to organize with paranoia, insecurity, and growing public apathy towards the mine’s abuses. During the six months of our collaboration, livestreams have arguably intensified the online abuse towards dirigentes, as Facebook pages dedicated to spreading apparently malicious and often extremely personal gossip in the name of holding dirigentes and communal authorities accountable “to the people” draw on the

information, sound bites, and images from these livestreams to fuel their own posts.

While it is difficult to assess whether (or how many) viewers are influenced by these social media posts, the chatter is enough for some dirigentes to restrict livestreaming or even grow suspicious of those who livestream. Efforts to use livestreams to generate confianza have only undermined it further, it seems. Seeing screenshots taken from livestreams alongside salacious captions has led to confusion and even accusations among dirigentes that those who livestream are also secretly running Facebook pages dedicated to undermining their fight against the unfair terms of mining activity. These anonymous posts reinterpret (unfavourably) the same scenes of "reality" that hopeful dirigentes present and narrate to persuade the population of the righteousness of their struggle against the mine's abuses and to convince others to join their protests. Although livestreams are meant to provide irrefutable evidence of reality, their capacity to do so is cut with, precisely, *desconfianza*, in which popular mistrust of "what is reality" begins to infiltrate dirigentes' own confidence in said reality. Rather than transparently displaying how things "really" are, livestreams end up exposing dirigentes to more intense critique; rather than reinvigorating popular support for dirigentes' protests, they provide new points of re-entry into existing narratives about peasant leaders' corruption and cast doubt on the sincerity of opposition to mining activity in general. The interpretive openness of "reality" grants livestreams a life of their own, transforming a technology of trust into a mechanism for manufacturing its opposite: *desconfianza*.

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