Recent Publications on #FOOD: Reviewers WANTED!

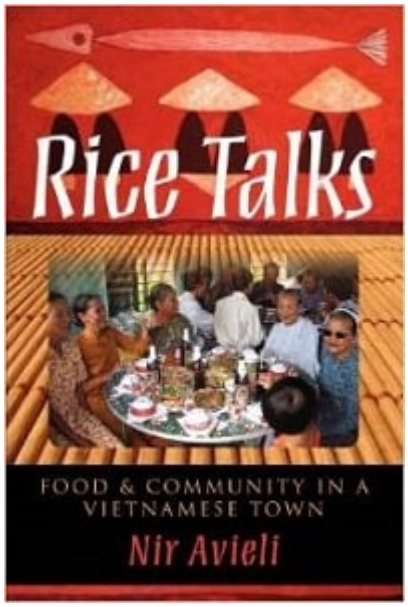
Allegra
September, 2014

To link in with Allegra's thematic week on the #Body, we have put together the following curated list of the latest books relating to the Anthropology of #Food, highlighting some of the exciting work being done in this area of study.

We construct our bodies through the consumption and non-conception of food, a subject explored in Charlotte Biltekoff book, looking at '*our obsession with diet as a proxy for health*'. In the books on our list food is used as a means to explore a wide range of subjects, such as ideas around how what we eat shapes our identities: from migration in the Caribbean, to the importance of rice and

community in Vietnam and inclusion/exclusion among the Garos of Assam. Other ethnographies focus on food movements and activism, linking in with Allegra's on-going thread on #Sustainability; Fair Trade tea in India, ethical food in post socialist societies and the impact of globalisation on food consumption are just a few of the subjects covered.

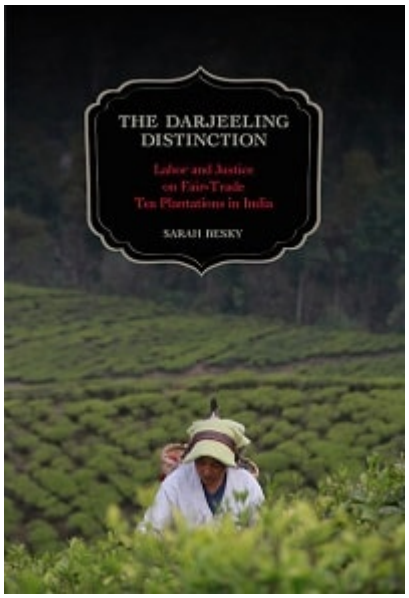
One of the ethnography on the list looks at the slaughterhouse and the killing of non-human bodies and another one explores women's agency in relation to food insecurity – so hopefully something for everyone! If you are interested in reviewing one of these books for us, please contact Allegra's Editor, Judith Beyer, or Reviews assistant, Sophie Allies-Curtis, at reviews@allegralaboratory.net and we will send you a copy!



Avieli, Nir. 2012. Rice Talks: Food and Community in a Vietnamese Town. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 336 pp. Pb: £15.99. ISBN: 9780253223708

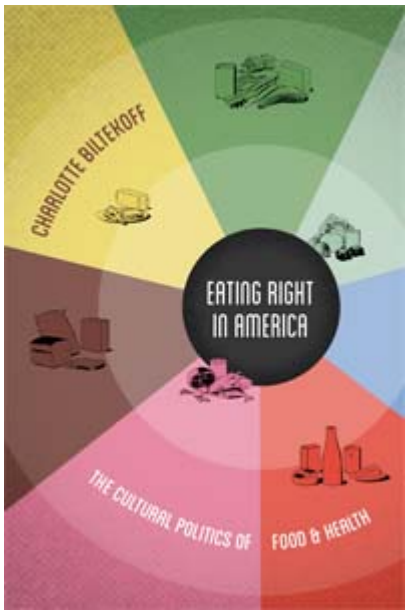
Rice Talks explores the importance of cooking and eating in the everyday social life of Hoi An, a prosperous market town in central Vietnam known for its exceptionally elaborate and sophisticated local cuisine. In a vivid and highly personal account, Nir Avieli takes the reader from the private setting of the extended family meal into the public realm of the festive, extraordinary, and unique. He shows how foodways relate to class relations, gender roles, religious

practices, cosmology, ethnicity, and even local and national politics.



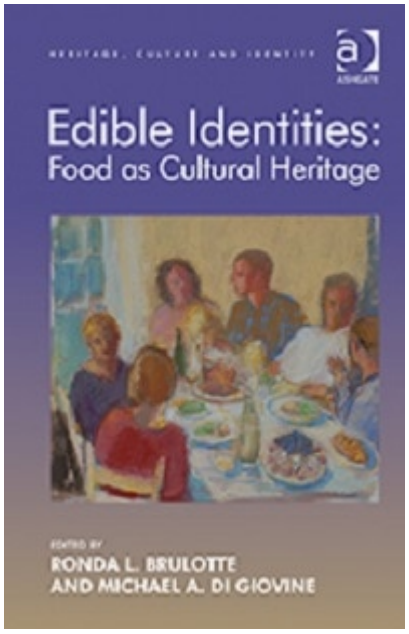
Besky, Sarah. 2013. *The Darjeeling Distinction: Labor and Justice on Fair-trade Tea Plantations in India*. Oakland: University of California Press. 264 pp. Pb: £19.95. ISBN: 9780520277397

In this nuanced ethnography, Sarah Besky narrates the lives of tea workers in Darjeeling. She explores how notions of fairness, value, and justice shifted with the rise of fair-trade practices and postcolonial separatist politics in the region. *The Darjeeling Distinction* challenges fair-trade policy and practice, exposing how trade initiatives often fail to consider the larger environmental, historical, and sociopolitical forces that shape the lives of the people they intended to support.



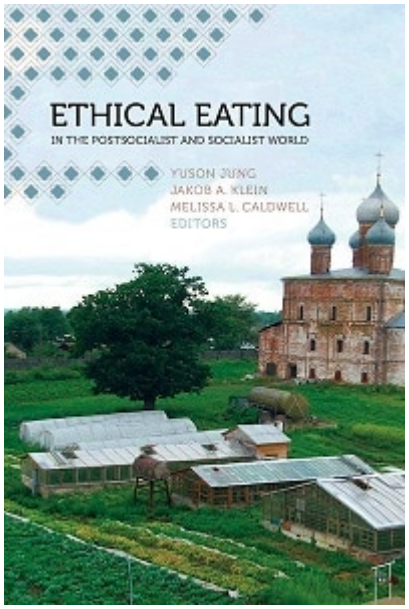
Biltekoff, Charlotte. 2013. *Eating Right in America: The Cultural Politics of Food and Health*. Durham:Duke University Press. 224 pp. Pb: £14.99. ISBN: 9780822355595

Eating Right in America is a powerful critique of dietary reform in the United States from the late nineteenth-century emergence of nutritional science through the contemporary alternative food movement and campaign against obesity. Charlotte Biltekoff shows that while the primary aim may be to improve health, the process of teaching people to "eat right" in the U.S. inevitably involves shaping certain kinds of subjects and citizens, and shoring up the identity and social boundaries of the ever-threatened American middle class. Without discounting the pleasures of food or the value of wellness, Biltekoff advocates a critical reappraisal of our obsession with diet as a proxy for health.



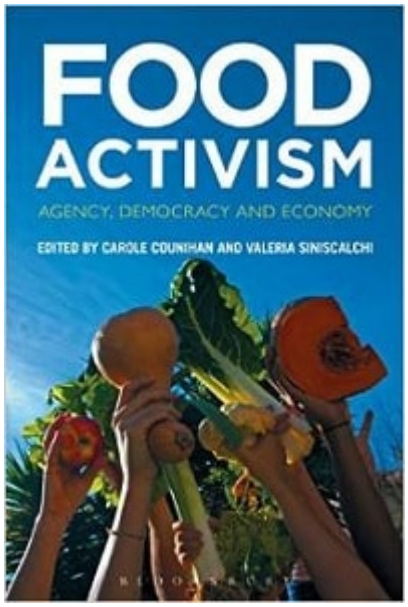
Brulotte, Ronda L. and Di Giovine, Michael A. 2014. *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*. Farnham: Ashgate. 244 pp. Hb: £65.00. ISBN: 9781409442646

Food – its cultivation, preparation and communal consumption – has long been considered a form of cultural heritage. A dynamic, living product, food creates social bonds as it simultaneously marks off and maintains cultural difference. In bringing together anthropologists, historians and other scholars of food and heritage, this volume closely examines the ways in which the cultivation, preparation, and consumption of food is used to create identity claims of 'cultural heritage' on local, regional, national and international scales.



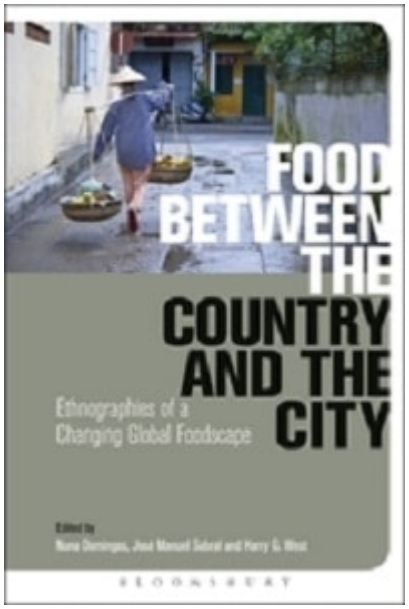
Caldwell, Melissa L., Klein, Jakob A. and Jung, Yuson (eds.) 2014. *Ethical Eating in the Postsocialist and Socialist World*. Oakland: University of California Press. 232 pp. Hb: $65.00. ISBN: 9780520277403

Current discussions of the ethics around alternative food movements–concepts such as “local,” “organic,” and “fair trade”–tend to focus on their growth and significance in advanced capitalist societies. In this groundbreaking contribution to critical food studies, editors Yuson Jung, Jakob A. Klein, and Melissa L. Caldwell explore what constitutes “ethical food” and “ethical eating” in socialist and formerly socialist societies. With essays by anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers, this politically nuanced volume offers insight into the origins of alternative food movements and their place in today’s global economy.



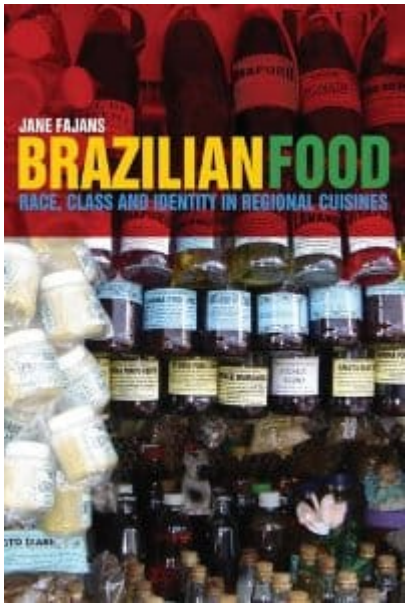
Counihan, Carole and Siniscalchi, Valeria. 2013. *Food Activism: Agency, Democracy and Economy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 264 pp. Pb: £17.99. ISBN: 9780857858337

Across the globe, people are challenging the agro-industrial food system and its exploitation of people and resources, reduction of local food varieties, and negative health consequences. In this collection leading international anthropologists explore food activism across the globe to show how people speak to, negotiate, or cope with power through food. □□Who are the actors of food activism and what forms of agency do they enact? What kinds of economy, exchanges, and market relations do they practice and promote? How are they organized and what are their scales of political action and power relations?



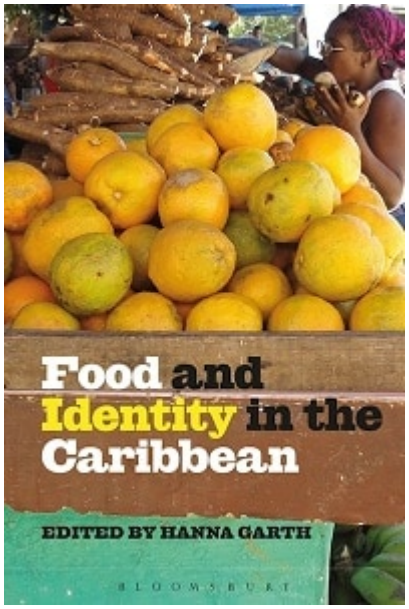
Domingos, Nuno Miguel, Sobral, Jose Manuel and West, Harry G. (eds.). 2014. *Food Between the Country and the City: Ethnographies of a Changing Global Foodscape.* London: Bloomsbury Academic. 264 pp. Pb: £22.49. ISBN: 9780857855381

At a time when the relationship between ‘the country’ and ‘the city’ is in flux worldwide, the value and meanings of food associated with both places continue to be debated. Building upon the foundation of Raymond Williams’ classic work, *The Country and the City*, this volume examines how conceptions of the country and the city invoked in relation to food not only reflect their changing relationship but have also been used to alter the very dynamics through which countryside and cities, and the food grown and eaten within them, are produced and sustained.



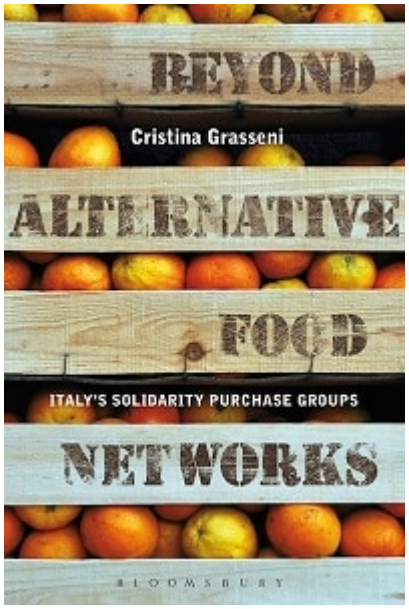
Fajans, Jane. 2012. *Brazilian Food: Race, Class and Identity in Regional Cuisines*. Oxford: Berg Publishers. 160 pp. Pb: 17.99. ISBN: 9780857850423

Brazil is a nation of vast expanses and enormous variation from geography and climate to cultures and languages. Within these boundaries are definable regions in which certain customs, history, and shared views help define an identity and cohesion. This book… explores the way in which food has become an important element in attracting tourists to a region as well as a way of making aspects of a culture known beyond its borders as cookbooks, ingredients and restaurants move outward in our globalized world.



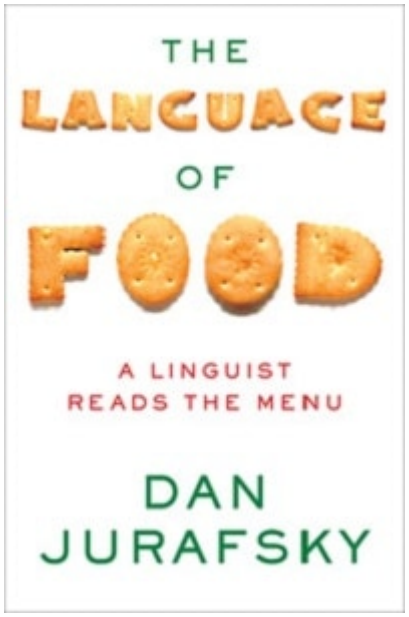
Garth, Hanna. 2013. *Food and Identity in the Caribbean*. London: Bloomsbury Academic 192 pp. Pb: £17.99. ISBN:9780857853592

This compelling volume brings together original essays that explore the relationship between food and identity in everyday life in the Caribbean. The Caribbean history of colonialism and migration has fostered a dynamic and diverse form of modernity, which continues to transform with the impact of globalization and migration out of the Caribbean. Based on rich contemporary ethnographies, the volume reveals the ways in which food carries symbolic meanings, which are incorporated into the many different facets of identity experienced by people in the Caribbean.



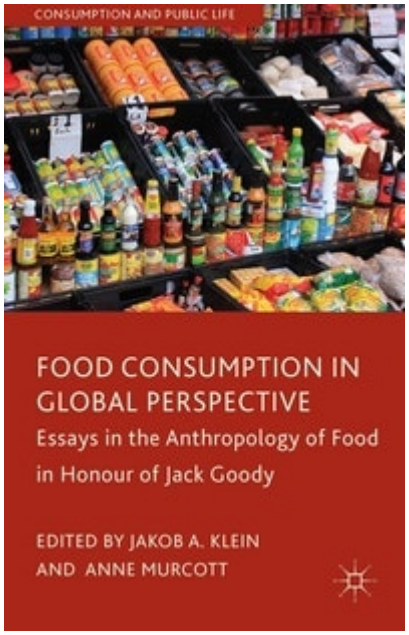
Grasseni, Cristina. 2013. *Beyond Alternative Food Networks: Italy's Solidarity Purchase Groups*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 224 pp. Pb: £55.00. ISBN: 9780857852274

Food activism is core to the contemporary study of food – there are numerous foodscapes which exist within the umbrella definition of food activism from farmer's markets, organic food movements to Fair Trade. This highly original book focuses on one key emerging foodscape dominating the Italian alternative food network (AFN) scene: GAS (gruppi di acquisto solidale or solidarity-based purchase groups) and explores the innovative social dynamics underlying these networks and the reasons behind their success. *Beyond Alternative Food Networks* provides original insight and in-depth analysis of the alternative food network now thriving in Italy, and highlights ways such networks become embedded in active citizenship practices, cooperative relationships, and social networks.



Jurafsky, Dan. 2014. *The Language of Food: A Linguist Reads the Menu*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 272pp. Hb: $26.95. ISBN: 9780393240832

In *The Language of Food*, Stanford University professor and MacArthur Fellow Dan Jurafsky peels away the mysteries from the foods we think we know. Jurafsky points out the subtle meanings hidden in filler words like “rich” and “crispy,” zeroes in on the metaphors and storytelling tropes we rely on in restaurant reviews, and charts a microuniverse of marketing language on the back of a bag of potato chips. From ancient recipes preserved in Sumerian song lyrics to colonial shipping routes that first connected East and West, Jurafsky paints a vibrant portrait of how our foods developed.



Klein, Jakob A. and Murcott, Anne (eds.). 2014. *Food Consumption in Global Perspective: Essays in the Anthropology of Food in Honour of Jack Goody.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 240 pp. Hb: $105.00. ISBN: 9781137326409

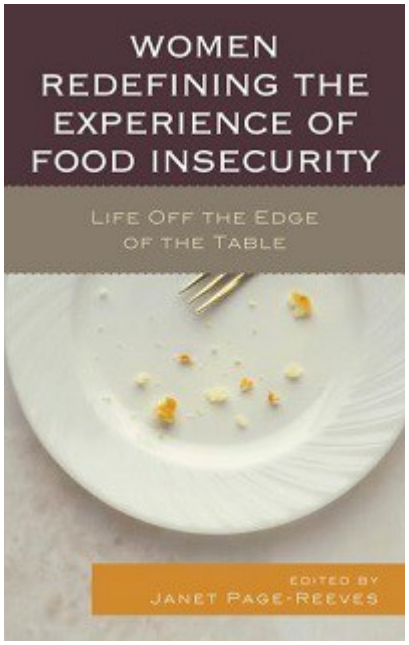
The globalization of food consumption has often been equated with the loss of culinary traditions and the homogenization of cuisines. By contrast, the anthropologists, historians and sociologists contributing to this collection reveal both rapid changes and also profound and sometimes surprising continuities in local food consumption practices in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and use these to shed light on shifting social boundaries and cultural identities. The volume combines ethnographic, historical and comparative analyses, situating local practices of eating, cooking and sharing food within transnational processes and contexts.

Marak, Queenbala. 2014. *Food Politics: Studying Food, Identity and Difference among the Garos*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 210 pp. Hb: £44.00. ISBN: 9781443857109

This ethnographic work discusses the politics inherent in food among the Garos of Assam (India) and Bangladesh. In these two areas, they live as a minority, and with and in the peripheries of a dominant non-Garo culture. Thus, this book examines the ways in which Garos conceptualize themselves and the 'other' world through the microcosm of food – the most important need of all. It discusses, among other topics, how the concepts of Garo food versus non-Garo food find fruition in social reality and collective memory, as an identity marker.

Pachirat, Timothy. 2013. *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight.* New Haven: Yale University Press. 320 pp. Pb: $22.00. ISBN: 9780300192483.

This is an account of industrialized killing from a participant's point of view. The author, political scientist Timothy Pachirat, was employed undercover for five months in a Great Plains slaughterhouse where 2,500 cattle were killed per day—one every twelve seconds. With much to say about issues ranging from the sociology of violence and modern food production to animal rights and welfare, *Every Twelve Seconds* is an important and disturbing work.



Page-Reeves, Janet (ed.). 2014. *Women Redefining the Experience of Food Insecurity: Life off the Edge of the Table*. New York: Lexington Books. 346 pp. Hb: $100.00. ISBN: 9780739185261

Women Redefining the Experience of Food Insecurity: Life Off the Edge of the Table is about understanding the relationship between food insecurity and women's agency. The contributors explore both the structural constraints that limit what and how much people eat, and the myriad ways that women creatively and strategically re-structure their own fields of action in relation to food, demonstrating that the nature of food insecurity is multi-dimensional. The authors… explore the contradictions inherent in the ways that marginalized, seemingly powerless women ignore, resist, embrace and challenge hegemonic, patriarchal systems through their relationship with food.

If you are interested in reviewing one of these books, please inform Allegra's review editor Judith Beyer @ reviews@allegralaboratory.net . **Here are our review guidelines:**

Spelling: British English. Please use –ise and not –ize word endings.

Word limit: 750-1500 words

Font: Times New Roman

Size: 12

Line Spacing: 1,5

No footnotes.

If you cite other authors, please reference their publication in the end.

The review is to be written within three months from the dispatch of the book.

Please also include your name and (academic) affiliation.

Recycling Faces and Identities?

Anne-Marie Martindale
September, 2014

When writing this piece I was asked to think in terms of recycling rather than producing something new, the usual obligation of academics writing for publication. It made me think. Put simply, facial transplantation can be seen as the recycling of faces, a scenario reminiscent of John Woo's film, 'Face/Off'. The facial mask and connecting corporeal material is removed from a dead person. The material is then transported and surgically reconnected to the body of another human. Since the first partial transplant in France (2005) over 20 of these experimental transplants have been conducted across the globe in, for example, France, America, China, Spain and Turkey. Years of research have gone into developing this highly complex set of surgical procedures, made possible by developments in immunosuppressant drugs.

Transplantation has so far been reserved for those with the most extreme facial 'disfigurements' who fit the corporeal and psychological criteria. The procedure has been described by surgical teams as quality-of-life enhancing, rather than life saving, a desire that has, in some cases, been underpinned by biomedical conceptions of disability. There is some disagreement about whether prospective patients can give truly informed consent at this early stage in the history of such surgery, especially as immunosuppressant drugs can shorten life even when used correctly. Concerns about recipient and patient anonymity have also been raised as most recipients so far have been subject to media scrutiny. Furthermore, there

have been concerns about the likelihood of the recipient looking like the donor, though these have been quashed by surgical teams.

> *Nonetheless, some clinical and ethical authors have suggested that identities are located either corporeally within or on the outer surface of the face, so that when transplantation occurs, identity transplantation will follow.*

As part of the literature review for my PhD research on the subject, I read 60+ transplant papers, on subjects ranging from surgical procedures to ethical discussions, and a number of themes emerged.

Scholars writing on the subject agree that faces are deeply significant for humans on numerous levels – from the individual to the social – though little anthropological evidence has so far been produced with the goal of exploring this idea in depth. Though some 'disfigurement' and transplant authors refer to '*the face*' (Lantieri, 2012, p.250) as a given, there is no single or ubiquitous definition of the term (Levinas, cited in Critchley et al., 2002), nor, apparently, are there any intrinsic or universal values attached to faces (Perpich, 2010, p.185). Despite this caveat, however, definitions of face generally incorporate notions of façade, personhood, agency, interaction and cognisance (Perpich, 2010), which thereby involve identification, appearance, self and other, activity and constraint.

It is no surprise that these phenomena are also embedded within definitions of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Csordas, 1994), or that they are reflected in my primary research findings. Faces also play diverse roles in social reproduction, for example by enabling the self to be protected during ritualistic and potentially dangerous transitional ceremonies. Anthropologists (Lévi-Strauss, 1963, cited in Pollock, 1995) and Egyptologists (Sorrel, 1973, cited in Tseelon, 2001), for example, have found evidence of facial masks being worn during ritual ceremonies or after death in order to protect the wearer from harm and to provide safe passage from one transitional status to the next.

Faces have also been ‘read’ to allay fears by providing information on the character of unknown others during periods of rapid social upheaval, such as the move from countryside to towns and cities during the industrial revolution in Britain (Giddens, 1991). During this period the pseudo-sciences of physiognomy and phrenology became popular (Twine, 2002; Popovic, 2007) as people tried to reduce their ontological insecurity (Giddens, 1991) by trying to make sense of the moral character of unknown neighbours and work colleagues. Finally, faces have been utilised to justify economic and political inequality, or to subvert it. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of faciality (1987, p.168), Benson (2008) has illustrated how the faces of migrant farm labourers in Brazil have been associated with a kind of moral dirt by powerful elite groups. The association, which is perpetuated by the print media, not only dehumanises them but also helps to keep their wages low and working conditions poor, thereby enhancing the profit margins of large farming conglomerates and keeping the price of exported produce low for the US market.

On the other hand, on the basis of 13 ethnographic narrative interviews conducted with facially ‘disfigured’ adults in Britain I have found that identities are not located within or on the outside of faces, so they cannot be transplanted between humans. Facial recognition is not the same as identity, as some transplant papers seem to imply (Modgil, 2011), and as my participants’ stories

revealed. Boas (1966, cited in Pollock, 1995) found when studying the Kwakiutl that not just the face but the whole body was considered important in enacting and displaying ritualised identity transformation. My conclusions echo this finding.

> *So, where does this leave us? Faces carry a special societal and individual significance; however, it is the whole person that is meaningful to identity creation and shift, not just the face.*

The extent to which the participants I interviewed were able to successfully negotiate revised embodied identities was influenced by the cause and context of the 'disfigurement', the extent of corporeal disruption and the extent to which the person was able to recognise their body-self, both performatively and visually, during the continued aftermath of transfigurement. I would like repeat the research with people who have undergone a facial transplant, to explore the participants' initial experiences of identity shift. I predict that their life experiences will also be significant in the creation and recreation of embodied identities over the life course. We do tend to recognise each other through facial familiarity, but our faces do not define us as we move through life, nor should they be allowed to.

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#BODY, #FOOD & Then Some!

Allegra
September, 2014

After a few weeks of upmost seriousness – namely our thematic weeks on Sustainable Development, Afghan Elections and University Crisis – this week we take it a bit easier, perhaps. The theme is body, and we have four fabulous posts lined up for your enjoyment.

Tomorrow we set things off with an old Allegra acquaintance, namely Bruce O'Neill who shared our shenanigans at EASA2014 & our panel on Boredom. He shares some reflections from his research among unemployed urban males who end up working as prostitutes – primarily because of boredom. What kind of notions of inclusion and exclusion enter into the equation, and how do notions of bodily sensation mix with the theme?

We continue with a post by Anne-Marie Martindale which we are learning is increasingly topical: facial transplants, and the anthropology thereof. Just how is

one's identity tied to one's facial appearance – and what new does an anthropological take offer the topic?

We then pamper you and us alike with another one of our Thematic Lists of Recent Exciting Publications – courtesy of our wonderful editorial team consisting of Judith Beyer and Sophie-Allies Curtis. This time the theme is 'The Anthropology of Food & Body', with an introduction offered by Sophie.

We conclude the week with a particular delicacy, namely a post by Paul Mullins on the Anthropology of Donuts (for real!) In his post, Paul Mullins introduces us to the history of 'mass-produced desire' via the Donut Machine.

MMM – we can taste the delicious icing on this thematic week already! Enjoy!

Dear 'Older' Generation' #UniversityCrisis

Miia Halme-Tuomisaari
September, 2014

Dear ‘Older’ Generation,

Yes –

You with the permanent posts

the faculty members

the tenure trackers

We simply wanted to pause you

For a short moment or two

To share with you

A few things

That cause frustration

stress and angst

Call it gap of generations

or maybe something else

But we simply cannot help but feel

that despite best intentions

you’re fundamentally lost

in getting our situation

And since misunderstandings

Breed ill feelings, insults and hurt

let us share a thing or two

of which you may not be aware

For when we receive (yet another)

Short post of year or two

you congratulate us warmly

on our privilege to immerse

ourselves in our ambitions

without intrusion from teaching

or bloody admin work.

When we attend a workshop

A conference – even abroad

You remind us ever so gently

Just how privileged we are

to have such opportunities

to present our work

in front of ALL those colleagues

– ‘we never had that chance’

When we receive our working spaces

– shared office (maybe a window),

– small corner (in a cramped library)

– ‘sorry, we have no space – it’s just the library card for visitors’

you remind us (again)

just how many others

would be thrilled to take our place

and how it really is a luxury

to simply – be us.

We nod and keep smiling calmly

for of course we’ re fully aware

of just how many others

applied for our posts too.

But something inside bubbles

For we burn to set things straight.

We feel that you should know

just how much, in fact,

we invest

to work in that tiny office,

to take up that post

to go to that event

That we move from country to country

That we (again) give up home

That we abandon friends and family

And maybe even more

That we postpone even HAVING a family,

since it’s never good time for a break.

And how do you even have

Or hold

A relationship on the go?

Do you know that you’re our Heros,

our Role Models,

our Ultimate Goals?

We put up with all this

JUST

to become LIKE YOU!

And there’s little in return

That we would never do

We WANT to do that teaching

And that admin hassle too

Hell,

We’ll even take on audits,

And an annual report or two

Or least of all

– the opportunity

to complain about it all!

All of that would mean

That we would have ‘arrived’

Become the ‘someones’ we always

Knew we were destined to be

That we, too, would have

An identity,

Even *career*

Why won’t you momentarily

Put yourselves in our shoes

Then each report and audit

Might be a kiss of death

Your eternal goodbye to the field

That you now view as

backbone to identity

livelihood

and glee

For that is what the reality

offers to us now

A constant flirt with ending

With no sights in the beyond

After our posts end

We’re right back

to square one

With nothing left but hope

Of yet a new dawn

Or so it feels

When we compete

yet again

for meager funds

with ever increasing hordes

So qualified

determined

and YOUNG

That on bad days

it makes you weep

and thought of giving up feels

best of all

Yes,

we know that things were tough

back in your days too

But just so that you know

It ain’t so great today

That’s all we want to say

So maybe the next time

we frown when you expect a smile

At least you'll know why

And you'll give us a break

For we are tired, real tired

By Miia Halme-Tuomisaari

Dedicated to Margaret Mary Vojtko

OCCUPY EVERYTHING! Graeber & the New Managerial Class

Allegra
September, 2014

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tSCieMc8n4

Today we continue sharing ‘Jewels of Allie’s Archives‘ to discuss the Crisis of Universities via the following video originally published in early February. It is a talk by David Graeber from the Symposium Anthropological Knots which was arranged in Helsinki in January 2014 and covered extensively by Allegra. David Graeber is, of course, one of the best known names in anthropology today, and thus he needs no further introduction (and for those still wishing for some more detail, click here for an an introduction run earlier at Allegra). And as a very special bonus, this video has brilliant comments by Jane Cowan on Graeber’s paper at the end.

Universities in a State of Exception

Dimitris Dalakoglou
September, 2014

Today we continue our thread ‘Allie’s Jewels on University Crises’ by a post by Dimitris Dalakoglou, originally published in October 2013. Written as a reaction to ongoing intense commotion at the time – University protests swept across the UK over worker benefits and student fees with the police resorting to heavy-handed methods to evict the occupiers, as well as a rejection of education privatisation more broadly – the points that the post raises are, if possible, even more compelling now. As Dalakoglou importantly points out: just why are we seeing this incessant obsession to ‘grade’ academics all the time, and what are the consequences of these practices on the content of scholarly work as well as academic communities more generally? This text was first published on the website of the Association of Social Anthropology of the UK and the

Commonwealth and we are grateful for this opportunity to republish it with Allegra.

UNIVERSITIES IN A STATE OF EXCEPTION

Until recently the mainstream idea was that higher education (HE) has two major purposes: to create knowledge, following certain methods, and to teach and disseminate this knowledge. I do not deny the complex politics of these processes. Nor do I neglect the exclusion of several social categories from universities and the consequent (re)production of hierarchies through HE that Bourdieu (1988), among others, has analysed. However, the increase (in the UK and globally) of the percentage of the population which enters universities arguably constitutes an index of social advancement. Probably in an ideal world we should had free access to universities for everyone who wanted to study in the tertiary level.

But of course in a world of mass starvation, war and exploitation, demands linked with education are too utopian. Nevertheless, the question today is not so much quantitative but qualitative: namely even if we achieve in a magical way access to HE for every person who wants it on the planet, does university works towards resolving fundamentally any of these global problems or is it mostly a useful tool of the economic and political establishment? Moreover, is this so-called restructuring of semi-publicly semi-funded HE in Britain (and elsewhere) a systematic attempt to further this model that wants universities to be an even more integral part of the system of economic and political sovereignty? Do universities and academia after all deserve to be defended?

The Academia of Control

Let's start with the notion of extra-academic impact and its implications since it encompasses a lot of the ideas behind the restructuring of HE in Britain. This so called non-academic impact now is one of the major parameters taken into account for the assessment of academic research. Usually for university-based social sciences and humanities non-academic impact is a potentiality that comes together with publishing and publicizing the outcomes of research. Whether we intend it or not, if an organisation, a formal institution, a social movement etc. finds our research useful for their purposes, they may be directly or indirectly affected by this published material. Another way that social sciences have a non-academic impact is through long-term changes in perceptions and the understanding of the social world, which then become public and collective knowledge with effect on formations such as political dynamics, human relations and personalities. However, there is an enormous difference between this long-term kind of effect and the new strategy that desires every academic to design research aiming to a clear and immediate utility for areas such as business and policy-making.

> *The problem is even more complex as the assessment according to this kind of non-academic impact does not apply only to newly designed research, but it extends into the assessment of existing one.*

The logic of the current emphasis on that so-called non-academic impact departs from two main ideas: (a.) that the non-academic impact of academic social research is not the "right" one and (b.) that academia as a separate sphere of social activity cannot be organised by its own (whether good or bad) logic, but rather, it needs to be colonized completely by logics coming from areas with very different ethics and culture, such as the neoliberal capitalist market. Apropos, the policy makers who advocate for such colonisation stole these aforementioned critiques of academia from the radical criticisms, which suggest that great parts of academia are alienated from the society and its interests, while the internal

logic of the academic world is admittedly far from perfect. However, nowadays the elites use this discourse in order to normalise their further hi-jacking of academia which hi-jacking in fact is the original source of these problems.

How does this link with the whole impact narrative? This new emphasis on non-academic impact transforms academic social research from a long-lasting and complex process into an end-product-oriented activity. This end-product will be assessed according to the width and quantity of its benefits (=profitability). Moreover, this product should have explicit beneficiaries (=consumers, clients) and explicit, quantifiable and immediate return. The character and the ontology of this end-product is instructed by its potential demand. The logic goes that if there is no demand, it should either not be produced, or it should have to be adjusted to fit the potential demand (=marketing). Eventually, the purpose is to force academia as a whole to translate itself entirely into the language of the capitalist market[2].

This translation of academic social science research in the language of immediate reciprocity and maximization of profit implies that most social scientists will have to self-discipline and exclude various areas of study if they want to survive. So in fact it undermines academic freedom. This is not to say that this process of marketisation (Shore & Selwyn 1998) and end-product oriented research and is not already going on. The Gaddafi-LSE example or the collaboration of anthropologists with US army, are indicative of this kind of ethos. However, it is different facilitating willing scholars to be useful to the various versions of establishment and forcing every academic research to be designed having amongst its main aims a non-academic impact of such kind.

The problem, nevertheless, is not only the form of assessment but the logic of non-stop assessments and classification as such. Contemporary society has been characterised as a control society (Deleuze 1990), this is the next step following the Foucaultian disciplinary society. Certain anthropologists described this process as the emergence of audit culture (see Strathern 2000) and they studied it precisely in reference to the British HE (Shore & Wright 1999). A main part of

this current regime of control is the culture of constant and intensive assessments that comes together with the colonisation of academia (and the rest of the world) by the principles of the corporate world.

> *These constant assessments are designed in a way that usually it is not possible for those assessed to attain the given targets.*

Furthermore, new assessment processes are being introduced all the time, so that a good score in so many scales is almost impossible. In this way structural hierarchies and subordination are being legitimated and normalised within the various organisations (universities included). This is a measure for exercising power since the assessed one is all the time requested to try harder, to produce more and faster to do something towards a new desired direction, to change something and intensify their work in order to score higher for the sake of it.

> *Simultaneously, these endless -frequently aimless- assessments require our participation either as assessed or assessors so we become ourselves agents of our own systematic and systemic subordination. In our case this domination of audit culture does not only create an apparatus controlling the content of academic research, teaching and writing, but even worse via this culture of assessment and classification, we are forced to compare ourselves and compete with our colleagues, other disciplines, other universities or other parts of the society. So when we all are too busy reproducing imagined categories and separations with the rest of the controlled, our power to react against the sovereign of control is weakened significantly.*

The State of Exception

But why do the political and economic sovereign powers want to go one step forward in controlling even more of academia and the social sciences? Aren't the

scholars who are eager to collaborate with the elites enough? Moreover, we live in a liberal democracy where the tolerance of institutionalised criticism provides the best alibi for some of the most reactionary types of governance.

Arguably, political and economic sovereignty is discomforted by the social sciences and with society at large. Most probably for the majority of politicians in contemporary liberal democracies, society is a necessary evil. The political establishment needs the society (=voters, tax payers) to legitimate and finance their power, but otherwise society is too complex and thus state-directed social engineering never works.

> *Social scientists will have either to help (that is have an impact for) the elites or keep quiet, because producing knowledge about society not only reminds state powers that society exists, but it also helps to make more and more members of the society aware of the conditions of their everyday life. So the less and less people accept — e.g. to work for too little, go to wars and kill each other or accept inequalities and obey to the rest of the principles– the easier the work of the authorities.*

Margaret Thatcher, being the least diplomatic of recent prime ministers in this country, stated this discomfort explicitly when she said that there is no such a thing as society. Her New Labour and Tory political offspring have followed in these steps, seeking to dismantle any notion of society informed by social sciences. Today the “big society” is one of those anti-social-science slogans about society, a Conservative Party’s pre-electoral slogan that was cited several times in the recent AHRC strategic plan. At the same time, the big capitalist enterprises that comprise economic sovereignty find equally annoying social sciences, which blur the conception of the two main categories of human beings that corporate world recognizes: working people (producers of wealth) and consumers of products.

Systems of sovereignty deal with their problems in various ways, but one of the most effective ones is via declaring a state of emergency. We recently saw such

situations in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria, while the British government threatened similar measures after August 2011 riots. According to Schmitt, the power of sovereignty is based precisely on its capacity to declare states of emergency (Agamben 2005). These states of emergency are periods of exception from the usual order of things. In the name of emergency some of the most violent and reactionary policies can be enforced.

> *So in the name of the current capitalist crisis the authorities declare a state of emergency, a crisis, in HE. We were told that in order to rescue academia from the monster of crisis we should allow the elites to shape a HE exactly as they wanted it, taming and domesticating this research that has emerged during the last few decade and it is critical and non-collaborative with the elites or just indifferent to the various projects of the people in power.*

In the name of the crisis the question is posed again: "What is the utility of contemporary social sciences, arts and humanities?" or to translate their question: "Why are more and more social sciences, arts and humanity scholars less and less collaborative with the elites the last few decades?" Such a question would not arise in our case if, for example, anthropology in Britain still was a subject linked with the colonial administration of the empire, like it was in the past.

Under these circumstances and within the context of this new scale of assessment (impact) many of us are left to believe that anthropology is not important enough because as it is, it cannot score very well in reference to impact to business and policy-makers.This is very true, because most of anthropological research thankfully has little contribution to the unjust world of exploitation that sovereignty shapes today.

However, if there is something that the social sciences -including social anthropology- can be proud of nowadays it is their links and their impact to several social movements that fought and fight repression causing problems to various authorities and making the world a better place: From Franz Boas' anti-

racism and the contribution of feminist scholars to anti-sexism to the critique to global capitalism, (neo-)colonialism or other nexuses of power that so many of our colleagues have managed so exceptionally.

The increase of people who have access to HE-learning also has helped to disseminate this kind of knowledge to many thousands of people, who approach the world through the eyes of the proverbial Other, including the Other to the power. This is a perspective that seems to annoy the various agents of sovereignty the most.

It's Not Them, It's Us

However, acknowledging the achievements of our discipline does not mean that things in the universities were rosy before the implementation of research impact and before the outbreak of the so-called crisis of higher education. On the contrary the purpose is not to return to the pre-crisis situation of academia, but to see this crisis as an opportunity for a radical change of the universities towards a new HE that will not allow for parts of its body to collaborate with the elites.

> *We get annoyed with centres for the study of democracy financed by dictators, but we do relatively little regarding the growing links between universities and e.g. NATO, MoD, the Police, MI5, big corporations or government ministers. But this is not exactly a hijacking of academia by the sovereignty and its apparatuses. We are dealing with a process that often takes place from within.*

The Gaddafi-LSE phenomenon did not emerge because of the bosses or the professors of the particular university. It was instead a version of a fairly typical phenomenon which found itself caught out. It is indicative of a wider and long-lasting trend which pushes universities (or even disciplines) to get more and more flexible morally in the name of their "utility" and in order to fulfil the various criteria that have been set within the diverse audit procedures.

But there is a further cost, at the same time that universities are developing these links with sovereignty, we are losing our links with the collective interests of the society, of the subordinated, the repressed and the exploited. Or even worse we become long-sighted: we get very excited about the Arab Spring, the 2008 revolt in Athens or the 2005 uprising in Paris, but we did not align ourselves effectively to so many struggles taking place next to us. Not even with the on-campus movements like the 2010-2011 anti-cut and anti-fee movement, which stormed our universities but had students as its main agents rather than academic teachers.

> *Our relatively comfortable, middle class salaries and lifestyles, our next book project, our next PhD student, our new course handbook, our impact report, our next task within the university administration and tomorrow's lecture makes us almost indifferent to what is going on around the society.*

Without underestimating at all the dramatic intensification of our working conditions and the fact that most academics (especially junior ones) are forced to work far more than 8 hours per day, it is also fair to say that the majority of academics arguably managed to lock ourselves into academic bubbles and wear our "I am an academic" hats. We often minded our own business, while crisis-capitalist governance was attacking gradually one after the other sectors of society in Britain or elsewhere.

To mention just a few of the strikes of this crisis-capitalism: back in the 1970s and 80s it was industrial workers in the West who suffered alongside entire continents in the global South. This was followed by the structural adjustment of postsocialist countries in the 1990s, and then striking the world via the recession in the US and now the euro-zone. Soon this new type of governance came home to roost amongst vulnerable people on benefits in the UK, to continue with the universal health care provision and public-sector pensions and HE, while the money coming from the heavy taxation of our labour is used for wars, for killing people in places where natural resources for global capitalism are located.

> *The question is what academics and social scientists did, as political subjects, as workers , as professional associations or just as fellow human beings when all these things were happening around us? The majority did very little, besides researching such phenomena, writing about them and possibly signing petitions, demanding aimlessly for better policies or for a better exercise of power, while it is apparent that these can be only the foundational sources of our problems.*

And what about dealing with the versions of this new neoliberal governance taking place very near us? What did academics and anthropologists do when the expansion of student population took place in terms of marketisation and not in terms of socialisation of learning? What did they do when people sharing the corporate world's principles undertook the management of our universities?

What did they do when the university education was transformed gradually from a teaching/learning centred process into a degree-centred training of future employees? What did they do when colleagues in our or other universities were offered precarious work conditions or lost their jobs? What did they do when our students learning and degrees were devalued and graduates were told that they have to go to work for free as interns in the name of "work experience"? What did we do when entire university departments or sections were shut down because they did not make it in that new assessment or after that new restructuring?

> *Some academics perhaps got scared from the blackmailing and were just afraid of losing their own jobs. However, a lot of academics have neglected the signs of neoliberal governance within our own universities.*

They hoped that this form of capitalism as crisis will not touch them harshly, because they are a "middle class", because they live in Europe, because their title is "Dr" and "Professor" or because they work in a "good" university or in a "good" department or they are "REF ready" and because this tiny bit out of 20 or so years of research life seems to fit within this new definition of extra-academic

impact.

After all, some others just thought that they could mind “their own business”, while someone else (experts, politicians, the authorities, UCU executives, university councils, managers, senators and so on) would deal with these issues. Or even worse, some scholars perhaps are convinced that we will manage to negotiate our collective future with agents of a system that will start eliminating universities and disciplines one after the other as soon as we do not manifest our utility to them.

> *The new capitalist governance is here, at this very moment, and it is preparing to wipe us out because we did not react effectively when it was wiping out the Others.*

The same Others that we often studied and we wrote about or/and are next to us. The bad news is that today we are privileged no more. We are part of that proverbial 99% of the Occupy Movement, but for some time now we have been merely watching the weaker parts of that 99% being ruined by this powerful 1%, and even worse our own work-places are a favoured arena and often became tools of that 1%.

But in the society that the current sovereign dreams of, there is no space for universities (not even) as they are today. So, now the state of exception for the universities has been declared from above. The question is: can we overcome ourselves, to correspond to this state of exception in an exceptional way? And I do not mean to rise defending the model set in academia before the outbreak of the crisis in HE, neither do I mean to rise demanding a better version of the exercise of power.

On the contrary, we have to think and act for ourselves not only as academics, but as workers and as political subjects that should resist to the new-coming form of governance. But at the same time, we should not forget that this impact story is just one little part of the problem. If we stick again only into our little university

tree we will miss the forest of crisis-capitalism. If we are to address crisis-capitalism, we should not demand a return to better version of capitalism, but aim to nothing less than the complete overthrow of such systems of sovereignty, within and outside the universities. So what I propose is not to defend academia for what it was or what it is, but for what can -and should- become during this crisis.

Read Dimitris Dalakoglou's interview with Allegra on the 'State, Violence, Infrastructures and Public Spaces in the European Periphery here

[1]I would like to thank many colleagues and friends who helped with their comments and corrections: Cathrine Degnen, Raminder Kaur, Eugene Michail, Klara Jaya Brekke, Antonis Vradis, Martin Webb, Anastasia Christou, Jon Mitchell, Christos Lynteris, Julie Billaud and Giannis Kalianos. The views in this text are mine and any potential errors my responsibility.

[2] The Bologna process is based on an agreement signed by most European governments and it is the compass for the restructuring of entire HE sector in Europe. The model has operated for many decades, but the Bologna process standardized it and facilitated for European governments to implement such model to the national HE systems. Moreover, several disciplines are already more market oriented than other ones, for example see pharmaceutical companies or other private corporations (e.g. war industry) which pay university-based teams to develop their products (or even better parts of their products).

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Neo-Liberal University in Permanent State of Exception!

Julie Billaud
September, 2014

A short while ago we celebrated Allegra's 1st birthday by re-visiting the 'TOP 10' posts of our first year. After this we have continued working hard behind the

scenes to set everything up for Allegra's next phases, namely to finalise the smooth operations of our 'Production Line' consisting of our wonderful editorial team (there is still room for those who want to join – remember our OPEN CALL!). As we further have already demonstrated over the past few weeks with the theme of #Sustainability curated by Fiona Murpy, and the week on the #AfghanElections overseen by Allegra's moderator Julie Billaud, the issues that Allegra addresses will in the future remain broad – and in part unpredictable also to us, Allegra's hosts. This will be both because of our continually expanding editorial team, and because of the increasing number of visitors who will oversee thematic weeks.

Yet, in the spirit of remaining true to our 'Slow Food Manifesto', on occasion we continue to slow things down by revisiting 'Jewels of Allie's Archives' – our constantly growing treasure trove. This week we do so by revisiting posts and developments that overshadow one of the most sever motivations to launch Allegra in the first place: **ongoing university reforms which undermine the vitality of our entire profession.**

To summarise just a few 'indicators' of these developments, things got off on a gloomy note from the very start with the news in Spring 2013 – when planning for Allegra was in full swing – that Marshall Sahlins had in an extraordinary act resigned from the US National Academy of Sciences to protest the Academy's policies support of research designed to improve the mission-efficiency of the U.S. military. Petitions pleading the amendment of these policies quickly spread, gaining vast support, but to our knowledge, with no impact.

Then we received news that the Berlin Senate had decided to cut the budget for the Forum Transregionale Studien from 2014 onwards, which in concrete meant the annihilation of the Rechtskulturen program run in collaboration with Humboldt University and launched with big fanfares a few years earlier. Again, petitions were quickly drawn up and their signatories included world-renown scholars all testifying to the unique scholarly potential and importance of the

program – again, to no avail. The program has since been quietly shut down with only the bitter memory of the promises for new kind of scholarly horizons left behind.

This summer things have hardly improved, if one treats the case of Steven Salaita as a benchmark: as most are aware by now, the University of Illinois reversed their decision to hire him on the basis of his 'inflammatory' tweets criticising Israel's actions in Gaza. Although the backlash of this decision has been and remains enormous, nothing is certain in its final outcome which is likely a long way from being reached.

New Management Culture with Audit Obsessions

Of course these details are symptomatic of much deeper developments which find one expression in our collective obsession for continually greater productivity – and what better way to 'grade' all this than by immersing ourselves in the 'audit culture' that has swept over the academia over the past few decades as the disciplinary techniques of the New Management Culture have effectively entered our universities. Some universities, in Germany, in France and in the UK desperately try to resist, but we find ourselves asking: for how long?

Why is it that so many of us are so complicit and accept to submitting to Research Assessment Exercises and Teaching Quality Audits when these represent our work so poorly? Is it, as Marilyn Strathern suggests, that the power of transparency is so pervasive that resistance becomes automatically suspicious?
The effects of these disciplinary techniques are multiple : Not only do they shape specific academic subjectivities, but they force academics to present themselves in certain ways. Thus this liberal obsession with 'impact' oriented/applied research also means that critical traditions are in grave danger. If one cannot

deny the need for research to be relevant, impact criteria often rely on quantifiable data instead of qualitative ones.

In his post titled 'Universities in a State of Exception' opening our thematic week on University Crisis Dimitris Dalakoglou discusses these issues and many more, poignantly observing:

> *"When we all are too busy reproducing imagined categories and separations with the rest of the controlled, our power to react against the sovereign of control is weakened significantly."*

Universities & the Dawn of the New Managerial Class

However as Dalakoglou also observes, of course audit cultures and new management techniques need to be examined in a far broader context to grasp both their complexity and full danger. Here we naturally refer to the subjection of scholarly work to the interest of capitalist pursuit. This issue has been amply discussed.

For example, as Leighton Christiansen explains in a recent article of the Socialist Worker: " Since the 1970s, colleges and universities have become (...) corporatized "knowledge factories," adopting big-business employment and organization models; shifting funding out of classrooms; and pouring money into administrators' salaries and corporate profit margins. These practices include eliminating full-time jobs, contracting jobs out to the private sector, cutting benefits–and hiring more part-time instructors. »

Indeed, one undoubted consequence that we have seen of this crisis is the

emergence of the 'academic fat cat', aka the vice chancellor. Evidence of this is staggering. For example, at Sussex University Vice-Chancelor Michael Farthing is now paid £280,000 (including pensions contributions), as compared to £178,000 in 2007 (that'll be *a 57% increase* then). This comes after Farthing made a strategic plan ironically entitled 'Making the future', which led to massive cuts and redundancies. Farthing has effectively disbanded the renowned Linguistics Department, shut down the Center for Community Engagement (which offered short courses for those in employment or unable to attend university) and cut fundings for the others. Farthing's decision to outsource services on campus has provoked widespread civil disobedience by students.

We continue our thematic week by giving the floor – quite literally – to David Graeber and the video that we originally posted of his speech in early February, 2014, of his talk at the Symposium Anthropological Knots arranged in Helsinki in January 15, 2014; a timely video as we anticipate the arrival of the special forthcoming issue of HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory on the event.

'Dear Older Generation'

After this we switch to a different mood in an attempt to capture the 'feeling' of this crises from the perspectives of those – or rather, us – who are struggling to 'make it' in the current, continually deteriorating professional situation. Increasingly, it is academics everywhere who seem to have become the « new precariat », while managers reap their awards. Last fall the symbol of these losing battles became the tragic fate of Margaret Mary Vjotko, a 25-year adjunct professor who died destitute at the age of 83 and who appeared to have become – at least momentarily – the symbol of devastating working conditions for academics in temporary positions.

An additional outcome of all this – and one of the most regrettable developments – is the stress and atmosphere of rivalry instead of collegial solidarity which

increasingly inhabits our professional sphere. We share a poem authored by Allegra's moderator Miia Halme-Tuomisaari dedicated to the fate of Vjotko on the plight to 'make it' in these dire professional circumstances – some will succeed, others who will die in destitute, both figuratively and concretely.

To the University of Utopia!

Where does all this lead us – in sentiments of despair? NEVER! For despite of Allegra being unfalteringly 'dead serious' about the issues that it addresses, it remains also 'tongue in cheek'. And humour being the best medicine & also the most effective way of resistance, we conclude our thematic week on University Crises with a beacon of light for online resistance: Université de Muri.

What Université de Muri really is, we will explain in further detail on Friday. Let us merely say for now that it is a the love child of inspiration meeting utopian thinking – still very much a sketch – but a creation backed up by both firm and unfaltering spirits.

Université de Muri is also our bow to the recent initiatives that we have seen to reclaim back the space of intellectual freedom that is currently under peril. These initiative include spontaneous lectures delivered by Slovej Zizek, Judith Butler, Andrew Ross, Joseph Stiglitz and many others in public spaces as a part of the Occupy movement. These lectures remind us of the urgency to collectively reclaim our space – a space whose content should not be dictated by benchmarks and indicators, but rather by the imagination that is necessary in order 'to think our times by thinking against our time' (as Wendy Brown phrases it).

In contrast with the open lectures organised by French intellectuals in La Sorbonne during the May 68 revolt, the open air lectures of the Occupy movement signify that the main space for us to reclaim is a 'state of mind' before being a physical space. Simultaneously the open-air lecture format is also a

powerful illustration of the extent to which we have been dispossessed. While our governments have poured public money to save the banks, we have been made homeless and our universities have become virtual, nomadic, utopian.

This fact is perhaps best captured by the University for Strategic Optimism, an initiative launched by students at Goldsmith University (London) as the Occupy movement found a momentum in the British academia. This imaginary university presents itself in the following terms on its website:

> *Our basic public services, we are told, are simply too expensive. They must be thrown under the wheels of the megalithic debt that bears down upon us. They must be privatised, corporatised and commodified (…) The UfSO offers an emphatic No! to this description of our current situation, and sees instead a magnificent opportunity, a multiplication of possibilities, the opening of a space in which we might think about, and bring about, a fairer and and more fulfilling society for all. In short: Many good reasons for strategic optimism!*

The UfSO inaugural lecture was held by Dr. Etienne Lantier (a pseudonym?) at

Lloyds TBS, Borough High Street London on November 24th 2010. Other impromptu lectures were organised in TESCO supermarkets, and in front of the Ministry of Business and Innovation, to alert the public that the University is indeed, for sale…and may well disappear altogether, as the recent shut down of the University of Athens sadly seems to announce.

Thus we conclude this week by sharing yet another idea for resistance – one that perhaps will start flourishing as the consequence of collective inspiration, or one that is destined to remain obscure. Whatever its future, the Université de Muri testifies one thing: as long as there is humour in resistence, even if neoliberal governance may continue its dishonourable efforts to discipline the minds and bodies of the workers of its 'knowledge factory', the free spirit of intellectual pursuits remains very much alive!

Democracy building unraveled

Julie Billaud
September, 2014

This thematic thread gathers together a series of posts by leading experts and anthropologists of Afghanistan, who analyse the 2014 Afghan presidential elections and their consequences for the future of the country.

2014 is supposed to mark the withdrawal of the NATO troops. It is therefore the right moment to draw some conclusions and assess the achievements of 10 years of international intervention and military occupation.

Reading the media coverage of the presidential elections over the past months, one cannot help but notice the disconnect between the narratives of 'democracy building' that have accompanied the invasion of Afghanistan, and the increasing level of violence Afghans are witnessing on a daily basis. Images of voters having their fingers cut and suicide attacks remind us that the correlation between elections and democracy is far from being self-evident.

Unlike the refugee camp seen as emblematic of the "state of exception", from the outset the process of "reconstruction" in Afghanistan was presented as a moment of return to normality or "normalization" after many years of war and authoritarianism [1]. This discourse, together with the regular organisation of democratic rituals such as elections, have fueled the illusion of a radical shift from an old order perceived as barbarian to a new democratic order. However, the inconsistencies and ambiguities of the "reconstruction" force us to understand such electoral performances as a form of carnivalesque expression in the sense of Bakhtin, aiming at bolstering the idea of change and progress for the Western audience while strengthening structural hierarchies at the local level [2]. Indeed, the very establishment of the Afghan humanitarian theater heavily relied on the *mise-en-scène* of "distant suffering" [3] by Western media and the introduction of arguments based on pity (especially towards women), freedom and human rights to justify the military occupation of the country. However, in the absence of material improvements in the lives of most Afghans, and with the return of warlords in power, Afghans have been forced to improvise various strategies to try and maintain a sense of continuity. The contradictions inherent to externally imposed emancipatory projects have fuelled popular sentiments of alienation, condemning Afghans to remain "prisoners of freedom", to use the title of Harri Englund's famous book [4].

In the first installment of this thread, Nichola Khan provides an overview of the various forces at play in the Afghan political arena. She rightly reminds us that 'violence *works*: not in achieving the institution of democracy (which would involve Taliban representation), but in forcing the redistribution of power in violent, perceptibly just terms that are far from transformative, but deeply conventional'.

Anna Larson questions the extent to which liberal understandings of democracy can be applied to the Afghan context. Building on Charles Tilly's democratisation theory according to which democracy building primarily relies on the capacity of the state and citizens to develop 'functioning' relationships, she questions the usefulness of such categories (state, citizen) to describe the Afghan political environment. In her view, such misguided conceptualisations and the disregard for local configurations of power have largely contributed to the failure of the 'democracy building' project in Afghanistan.

Noah Coburn's ethnographic exploration of the electoral process leads him to

similar conclusions: “The international intervention, he argues, has cumulatively contributed to the destabilization of Afghanistan, and the widening of the gap between the government and the Afghan people”.

We conclude the thread by two posts by Antonio De Lauri and Niklaus Miszak, providing broader reflection on the values and ideologies that guide ‘democracy building’ exercises. De Lauri demonstrates how the ideology of ‘hope’, in Afghanistan like in Italy, has been used as a powerful ersatz against civic engagement and meaningful political action. Along the same lines, Miszak argues that the campaign was sold to the public in purely technical terms, as a means to ‘domesticate violence’, with no genuine attempt at triggering deeper political debate on the future of the country. Ironically, violence has not been domesticated and the threat of war is each day more present as presidential candidates continue their fight for capturing power.

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(UN)GOVERNED SPACES – An exhibition by Gregory Thielker and Noah Coburn

Allegra
September, 2014

October 28 – December 2, 2014
Opening October 28, 2014

Usdan Gallery at Bennington College
One College Drive, Bennington, Vermont
gregorythielker.tumblr.com

For this exhibition, artist Gregory Thielker collaborated with anthropologist, Noah Coburn, to create a complex portrait of Afghanistan today. Featuring a thirty-five foot long panoramic painting of Shomali Plain north of Kabul as well as smaller paintings, photographs, text, and video, the exhibit takes stock of the present political and social upheaval in Afghanistan as well as looks back to the history of conflict and forward to the legacy of US intervention. (Un)governed Spaces

focuses on the region surrounding the US military base at Bagram, where the collaborators conducted on-site research for the last three years. Here, a rich history of military occupation from Alexander the Great to Soviet Occupation to Taliban and finally, current US military has created a crossroads of past and present. In the panorama installation, dramatic mountains and lush fields contrast with barbed wire and concrete of the base, creating a representation of the fractured political and social lives that people lead around the base.

The exhibition will also function as a discussion space for talks and special events related to reflect on the future of Afghanistan and US foreign policy. Considering the complicated political issues, the exhibition draws in the voices of Afghan experts, local residents, and Bennington College students, as well as exhibit visitors. While the interests of anthropology and art do not always align, this project grows out of a rich and occasionally conflicted dialog about place and shifting historical narratives. Over the course of the last three years, Mr. Thielker and Dr. Coburn lived, researched, and toured the region with no military oversight. This exhibition is the result of intimate conversations with people living near the base, interviews with soldiers returning from tours in Afghanistan, on-site sketches of the bazar and local houses, and historical and ethnographic research both in Afghanistan and the United States.

Through the exhibition, the sense of the past is tangible and yet also hidden from view. A burntout government office, the walls of the Bagram airbase, and a Hellenic vase discovered nearby each tell different stories about the region. The fractured, yet intact surfaces reveal the damage and resilience caused by ceaseless warfare. The paintings, video, and photographs are paired with

narrative descriptions of the region's history, ethnographic accounts, and interview selections. The result is viewing experience that aims to show the complexity of representing Afghanistan today and how the past seems to echo the current instability in the region. (Un)governed Spaces is a powerful contrast to the predictable narratives of Afghanistan because it combines anthropology and art to create a layered and open-ended presentation of life amid conflict.

Gregory Thielker lives and works in New Jersey, as well as abroad. His previous work includes a Fulbright grant to research the Grand Trunk Road in India as well as site projects in El Salvador and Norway. Recent solo exhibitions include "(Un)governed Spaces" at Republic Gallery, Paris, and "Highway" at Flashpoint Gallery, Washington, DC. His work has been reviewed in The Independent, La Repubblica, and The Washington Post. He is an Assistant Professor of Art at The College of New Jersey. Noah Coburn is a Professor of Anthropology at Bennington College, in Vermont, with many years research experience in Afghanistan. He is the author of "Derailing Democracy in Afghanistan" (Columbia University Press, 2014) and "Bazar Politics: Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market Town" (Stanford University Press, 2011).

Elections as domestication of violence and threats of war

Niklaus Miszak
September, 2014

The 2014 Afghan presidential election reveals the dual quality Achille Mbembe described in *Politics as a Form of Expenditure*[i] as, both, the domestication of violence and the threat of war over the capture and distribution of power. Both have played an important role in shaping the election process in terms of voter mobilization before 14 June, the day of the 2nd round of presidential elections, and has since then come back to haunt Afghanistan and bring dissent to the core of the community. Furthermore, two forms of election mobilizations have been crucial for the election outcome: an external form, by painting the political opponent as a security threat not just to the society holding the elections but to the whole region; an internal form, by mobilizing the untapped reservoir of voters in the rural zones, particularly women and youth, which in most countries are crucial to capture and maintain power. Both have relied on the opportunities offered by an important transformation of public space, especially the emergence of a TV debates, social media and the increasing circulation between the towns and the countryside.[ii]

Since 14 June, elections as domestication of violence has fluttered into my e-mail

box on an almost daily basis day, for example, in the form of the UNAMA press statements. UNAMA has put in place a series of institutions and languages for deliberation and negotiation, an anti-politics machine of sorts,[iii] where questions of war and power are transformed into “candidates’ technical concerns” about the process of auditing of the election results.[iv] The presidential candidates have adopted this language and publically haggle over a whole range of technical issues, from how many votes will be recounted, to the separation of fraudulent from valid votes to dealing with similar handwritings on election checklists and result sheets from different provinces.

The language of domesticating violence immediately mingled with the threat of war and division. As a means to build leverage and assure a maximum share of power in the new Afghan government, supporters of both candidates diffused threats of war.

In its internal form, shortly after the 2nd round of elections produced the result of Ghani in a comfortable lead, the specter of insurrection started to haunt Kabul as rumors circulated about groups arming themselves to protect the status quo through force. In its external form, for example, Balkh provincial governor Attah Mohammed Noor addressed an international audience through foreign media, such as the Washington Post, in mid-August to warn about the potential of a coming insurrection “if the vote recount was one-sided or fraudulent”[v].

This appeared to me as a reversal of the situation before the 2nd round of elections when the specter an insurrection was coming from a different corner of town.

After Abdullah Abdullah won the 1st round of the Afghan presidential elections, the word on some streets was of a coming insurrection in rural Pashtun areas if Abdullah would also win the second round, with the immediate specification, that insurrection meant the Taliban being at the gates of Kabul within a few days.

Does the focus on the threat of war and division, the focus on the "sublimation of violence by means of elections" conceal what could also be seen as a genuine competition, a domestication of violence and rejection of war? What happened, *too*, between the first and second rounds of the elections was simply a strong mobilization in rural Pashtun zones, tapping particularly rural women and the youth, the reservoir of postcolonial power. [vi] This mobilization reflected the fear of many Pashtuns of double trouble at the national and the local level: at the national level because Afghanistan has always been ruled by a Pashtun and this should continue to be the case; on the local level, because Abdullah Abdullah winning the presidency would mean being dominated, or ignored, for another five years by his long standing allies. In the southeast provinces, Abdullah Abudllah's local allies happen to be the local opponents Pashtun tribal elders; in the east, they are the increasingly unpopular mujahideen turned businessmen. This potential double trouble in national and local politics was definitely more of a nightmare for many than going through the hassle of organizing voter registration cards and facilitating transportation from the villages to the polling centers on Election Day for the entire community, including the women.

It's a numbers game, and even in conservative and patriarchal southeast, mobilizing the women's vote was one of the ways for the rural areas to contribute to defeat Abdullah and his local allies.

Mobilizing the rural zones from the east to the south needed another form of domesticating violence, the buy-in from the Taliban. After the 14 June Election Day, stories circulated quickly about successful and unsuccessful deals with the Taliban, nothing the Taliban leadership officially approved of, but arrangements with village-level commanders not to interfere with the voting. The success of the local deals in rural Pashtun areas seems to have been as varied as Afghanistan's checkered political landscape, differing from village to village. Where local deals were possible, people mobilized strongly for Ashraf Ghani, either as part of organized campaign teams or on their personal initiative, and those who could afford it used their own cars to drive around relatives and neighbors to the polling stations, sometimes to more than one, all day long. Some were organized, some did so spontaneously but in most cases there was a strong sentiment that this Election Day had been important and that they played an important role in mobilizing. Even now, two months after the elections, they tell stories of Election Day, not without pride, about eating the warlords' food at their campaign rallies and taking their money but voting for the other candidate. Some campaigners recounted how they played a double game, officially mobilizing for the candidate who was paying them but secretly telling people to vote for the other.

But the capture and division of power is proving more and more difficult, and what seemed like a triumph of the domestication of violence manifest in the impressive election mobilization has returned to the prospect that the political

struggle will be settled by force. The specter of war has returned to haunt society and bring dissent to the core of the community.

References

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[ii] Ibid. p.317.

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[iv] **UNAMA Press Statement, KABUL, 1 September 2014**

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[vi] Mbembe, A., 2006. p. 316.

After Elections: Hope?

Antonio De Lauri
September, 2014

Worldwide debates on 2014 Afghan elections condense some of the most influencing myths – one of which certainly being related to freedom – of the "democracy era". That elections are the primary expression of political freedom, and the latest is the substance of democracy represents a sort of modern syllogistic mantra that informs our political (though not only political) ideologies and imaginaries.

According to mainstream political debates elections can be described as a limit in the sense that they create a “before” and “after”. Yet this is more an illusion than an accurate observation as the passage from “before” to “after” is exactly what we are forced to see in the elections, consequently overlooking the fact that elections have the intrinsic power to bring the “before” into the “after” – i.e. the power to reproduce established forms of social hierarchy into a (only in appearance) new order.

In *History at the Limit of World History* Guha suggested a different use of the concept of limit. He defines “limit” as a critical category useful to shed light on the voices and stories that remain excluded from so called world history. Guha’s use of the idea of limit helps us to focus on what tendentially falls outside of the rhetoric of elections as the achievement of freedom and “deep democracy”. From here it becomes indeed possible to capture the acting mechanisms that create the conditions for the past to take a new form in the present. In fact, elections do not simply consist in the transition between “before” and “after”. Rather, they theatrically create the social environment in which the past comes to occupy present’s time – thus affecting the possibilities of imagining the future in other ways.

A few weeks ago a friend of mine from Kabul emailed me. It was a while since last time I received news from him so he kindly updated me about "his life". He then added: "Have you seen what's going on with elections? Hope Hope Hope… still better than hate, right?"

The language of hope is certainly dominant in the political jargon of electoral campaigns. In Italy – where the shift rotation of different non-elected governments has generated a permanent state of electoral campaign – hope has become the unavoidable element of political speeches, the most effective way to make people accept the current collective state of being. Political action has been deprived of any purposeful intentionality and civic engagement has been replaced by hope.

The road of "Afghanistan towards democracy" – to use a humanitarian slogan – seems to have to go through the site of hope, where perhaps it is destined to get bogged down. In the meanwhile, we see the past reproducing itself in the present.

Violence, Voting and the Monopolization of Power

Noah Coburn
September, 2014

The following is based on edited excerpts from the introduction of Derailing Democracy in Afghanistan: Elections in an Unstable Political Landscape as well as field notes from the 2014 Presidential and Provincial Council Elections.

On a cold rainy morning this April, I walked past half a dozen police vehicles that had blocked off the entrance to my hotel. While in Kabul I normally stay with friends or in a low-key guesthouse, but with multiple attacks in the city over the past few weeks, some specifically targeting the elections, I decided to be a little more careful with my security. Hoping in a Corolla driven by a friend, the streets were eerily quiet. As we crested the hill headed north outside of Kabul, however, the skies momentarily cleared, and we began to see more cars and pedestrians. Predictions that Afghans would stay away from the polls during these presidential and Provincial Council elections appeared unfounded.

It is clear that the international intervention in Afghanistan had not unfolded according to anyone's expectations following the initial invasion in October 2001. The early estimates of a 3-year engagement by international diplomats and policy-

makers seemed, in hindsight, incredible. With a national government widely perceived as predatory, an insurgency gripping the majority of a country that had initially welcomed the presence of NATO forces and countless failed development projects, many Afghans and internationals were left wondering, what had gone wrong?

> *Opinions varied: was this due to the failure to include the Taliban in preliminary negotiations at Bonn? Were the corrupt fumblings of Karzai and his advisors to blame? Was it the shift in American focus towards Iraq? Or was Afghanistan truly the graveyard of empires? Surprisingly missing from many of these debates have been the series of elections held in 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010.*

In the post-Cold War world order, it has often been assumed that the best way to create stability and build public support for a new government in the wake of international interventions is to combine economic aid with the sponsorship of a series of elections (and other state-building projects). But in Afghanistan, after five fraudulent and violence-plagued trips to the polls, it is clear that elections have not contributed to stabilization at all.

As the international community formulates what the transition out of Afghanistan will look like, many Afghans and international actors have dismissed elections as failed experiments in democracy. However, a combined decade in the country looking at issues of local politics and governance and discussing these with Afghans across the country has left us with a more disturbing question: Have elections actually contributed to the failure to establish a legitimate, representative government in Afghanistan? What if some of our most basic assumptions about what elections do are in fact unfounded? Is there a better way to understand elections and their impact on local politics?

We believe a careful look at the local political landscape in Afghanistan demonstrates that the way in which elections have been implemented over the course of the international intervention has cumulatively contributed to the destabilization of Afghanistan, and the widening of the gap between the government and the Afghan people. Representative governance – that is, an ideal form of political resource management in which elected representatives make decisions for the good of a given community – has suffered as a result. This is not to say that elections should not have occurred in Afghanistan at all, nor that the country was in some way "unready" for them.

> *Rather, we argue that the way elections were manipulated by the Afghan political elite – with the support of international actors who viewed elections as a primarily technical, as opposed to political, procedure – constitutes the root of the problem.*

Elections are not solely, or even primarily, to blame for the failure to establish a truly representative government in Kabul. However, electoral processes did contribute to this failure. Specifically, the international community's focus on technical aspects of the elections and the tendency of both the American government and the international media to see the simple holding of elections as

a sign of success diverted the gaze of both Afghan and international observers from the more significant political processes that were taking place at a deeper level. Those looking for quick answers on how internationally-sponsored elections should be held in post-conflict situations will be disappointed. However, we do hope that the Afghan case will offer some suggestions on both an academic and a more practical level as to how we can sharpen our approaches and better understand how elections re-shape the lived political experiences of all involved.

The lines at polling stations in rural areas to the north of Kabul are surprisingly long. Some are even longer than they were in 2009. This is particularly remarkable because the rain and cool weather has made standing in line uncomfortable at best.

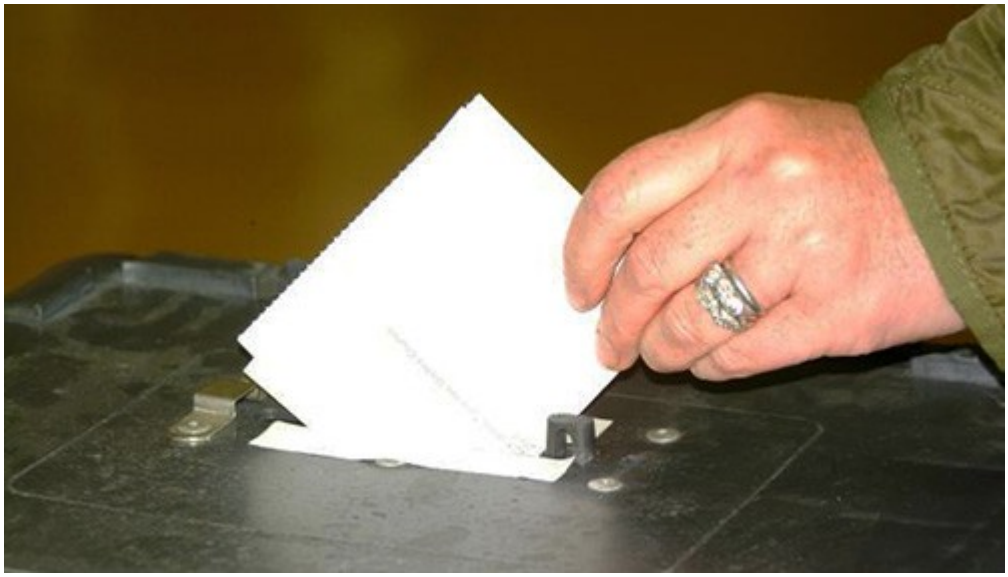
At polling stations the voting is orderly. There is always some chaos and confusion, particularly since the Provincial Council ballot has hundreds of names on it, but for the most part the voting is smooth, which makes sense since, for many voters this is the fifth time that they are casting ballots since 2005. Voters at the polling stations also seem positive, looking forward to a new government that is a break from the corrupt reign of Karzai. Especially as the day goes on and there are no reports of large scale attacks people seem satisfied with the process.

We have been working in Afghanistan since 2005, focusing particularly on

elections since the campaign leading up to the 2009 elections. Through out our work had both benefited and suffered from the fact it is a collaborative project by an anthropologist and a political scientist. It treads the line between political science, political economy and anthropology, and this is problematic for some. Political scientists may complain about our lack of quantitative data, while some anthropologists may argue that we focus too much on structures and processes. Ultimately, however, we believe that this blending of approaches is critical in understanding politics as a "lived experience." While this is more than a set of processes, it often takes place with a keen awareness and interpretation of certain processes and rules.

> *These, of course, can be followed or broken in different ways, and part why the Afghan elections are fascinating is the way in which rules have been both followed and broken – but an awareness of the rules still shape the way that politics are lived and decisions are made.*

The issues of how individuals and communities respond to these structures and processes, and how these responses shape politics, are what occupy us for most of this work. Elections are one such process that we feel are a useful venue for observing politics in action. Particularly in Afghanistan, where competition is often hidden and motives are veiled, elections have been a rare case of at least quasi-public and active political debates. Furthermore, while the international community's focus on elections seems to grow about six months before an election and peters out a month or two after, part of our argument is that a careful look at the past election cycles in Afghanistan reveals some important insights about how elections and other processes have long-lasting effects on politics in Afghanistan, far beyond the experience of a presidential or parliamentary poll every four or five years.



Interviewing voters in the days following the elections, one can feel the initial optimism slipping. Immediately there are accusations of fraud with multiple candidates declaring victory. In the June run off it appears there is even more fraud. There are accounts of thousands of votes casts in places where there had been almost none in the first round.

> *Candidates begin slinging accusations at each other. The Independent Election Commission is accused of massive fraud. Partial results are announced late. At the least, it seems, they are guilty of an ineffective counting procedures.*
> *One man declares: "I thought I knew what democracy was, but now I am not sure what is happening."*

We believe that an approach that blends anthropology and political science is particularly effective for re-evaluating our understandings of elections, especially in the Afghan context. In the social sciences, elections have (with a few notable exceptions) been part of the domain of political science. Anthropology, historically rooted in the study of non-Western societies, has little history of studying

elections, even while they are deeply shaped by issues that have traditionally interested anthropologists such as kinship, nationalism and class.

Political science approaches are useful for understanding the structures and procedures of elections, but by focusing on them as specific events, they tend to miss the way they are embedded in multiple layers of political and cultural struggles within both communities and nations. Elections take place within certain political cultures, but just as importantly, elections can reshape those political cultures. For this reason we have attempted to analyze elections as a part of wider political processes and debates encapsulated by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "structuring structures" that create a certain political "habitus" for subjects – in this case, the political landscape in which individuals and communities live. Even while Bourdieu can be read as overly deterministic, we believe this landscape and the processes that take place in it, such as elections, do not dictate how an individual makes choices, but does shape the way that individuals think and feel as they make their choices.

> *John Kerry flies in to negotiate between the two final candidates. This is the second time that this has happened. With the supporters of one candidate accused of wide scale fraud and the supporters of the other threatening to turn already rowdy protests violent, there is talk of setting up a parallel government. Elections seem to have taken an already weak government and pushed it towards the brink.*

Take rural Paktia as an example. In this mountainous Pashtun area in southeast Afghanistan, elections function as an organized part of the local political landscape that lead people to perceive their political worlds in certain ways. On the one hand, elements of elections shape the way politics is understood for anyone socialized in this political landscape; the way that votes are cast suggests that everyone gets an equal right in the determination of leadership, while the system of candidates competing for votes emphasizes an adversarial (as opposed to negotiated) approach to selecting leaders. These elements influence the way individuals understand certain issues, such as the role of local elders, individualism and women's rights.

> *At the same time, however, elections are themselves structured by a series of additional political ideals and notions that in turn shape the way voters perceive and act in the election experience.*

In Paktia, strong tribal ties and an emphasis on kinship leads individuals to vote together as a family more frequently than would be expected in Western instances. This in turn shapes campaigns in which candidates try to secure entire blocs of votes. In this case, while individuals' political experience is being reshaped by elections, the political habitus of these individuals (and the communities of which they are a part) is also reshaping the elections themselves.

In some instances clashes can occur between accepted social norms and the political processes of elections, leaving voters to debate and reformulate aspects of their political worlds. As a result, while the one person, one-vote balloting system suggests that all individuals have an equal voice in the election process, in conservative Paktia it is rare for women to leave their large family compounds.

The mere extension of voting rights to women has created a good deal of debate at multiple levels of Afghan political society across the country over the wider role of women in the public sphere. While in many instances these debates reflect political conflict, there is also a certain amount of opportunity for individuals to negotiate and create new forms of power. For example, a common recent form of fraud has involved men coming to polling centers with a stack of voter registration cards asking to cast votes on behalf of their "female relatives." This strategy exploits a combination of the modern technical nuances of the balloting process and local conservative values to secure more votes for a family. At the same time, in some areas women have been able to cast votes independently and without intimidation at polling centers, negotiating a new, albeit limited political space in the public sphere.

In order to fit some of these elements into our analysis, we study the part elections play in the process of political ordering and structuring of society, but at the same time look at how elections themselves are being shaped and structured by other social and political conditions. Elections may therefore provide a structure within which an individual must make a series of choices (to vote or not to vote; to vote collectively or according to differing individual convictions, etc), but at the same time the way that elections are understood culturally, the history of previous elections in the country and many other factors will all shape how they are held.

> *For example, we will see that fraud in the elections of 2004, 2005 and 2009 directly contributed to fraud in 2010, since political actors increasingly learned how to manipulate the system using illegal means and saw electoral fraud as an increasingly viable political option.*

Viewing elections with this broader lens leads us to expand the kind of questions we ask about them far beyond simply establishing who won or lost. How was the election won? What resources were used? How do people talk about the election in relation to other political struggles? What groups gained or lost political

capital? What types of rhetoric, old or new, were used to mobilize voters? What does this mean on both a macro and micro level for politics within a community?