



Democracy building in Afghanistan?

Anna Larson
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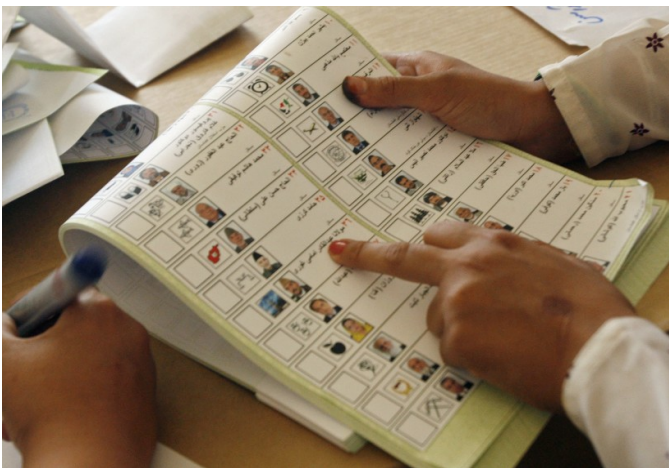


The following thoughts combine views expressed in [Derailing Democracy in Afghanistan](#), blog posts written for [Afghanelections14.com](#) and observations made over the last decade of international intervention in Afghanistan.

The summer of 2014 has come to be synonymous with electoral chaos in Afghanistan. For many Afghans, the breakdown in the system, exacerbated by continual disputes between the Ghani and Abdullah camps, is the nail in the coffin for Afghanistan's 21st-century experiment with liberal politics. But stepping back from the focus on elections alone, what of democracy, and of democracy building, in Afghanistan? How will the debacle of 2014 affect prospects for an Afghan democracy, if at all?



According to a [recent article in the New York Times](#), if Ghani and Abdullah can “cooperate fully with the ballot audit, accept the results...and quickly form a functioning government” then there is a chance that they could “put Afghanistan on the path to a real democracy”.^[i] What the authors mean by “a real democracy” is unclear, but they appear to assume that if a result can be successfully established then democracy will follow, though surely history and comparative politics demonstrate otherwise, with examples from across the globe. Beyond this, however, is a more troubling phrase that implies the possibility of forming a “functioning government” in a short space of time. It is to this assertion that the following thoughts will attempt to speak.



Democracy (in theory) is all about functioning government. Regular fair elections facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a functioning government, but are institutions designed as a means to a broader end, rather than as ends in themselves. My somewhat crude interpretation of “functioning government” here is one that, at the

very least, caters to the basic needs of its citizens and is able to collect tax revenues from them without opposition in order to do so.

Put this way, the definition of a functioning government sounds relatively straightforward: but establishing such a symbiotic relationship between government and all citizens (and the key here is the “without opposition” clause) can take a great deal of time and a great deal more contention.^[ii]



Charles Tilly has written at length about the nature of democratisation: for him, the process of making more interactive and “functioning” the relationship between citizen and state. He warns that this process is neither linear nor teleological, in that de-democratisation can occur just as easily if not more so than democratisation, and that a country’s path to democracy can look more like a plate of spaghetti than a decipherable, uni-directional trajectory. This is because state capacity can be over-exerted, provoking citizen reaction or even revolution or civil war. At the other extreme, state capacity can be so weak that few if any public services are provided, also provoking public reaction (whether in the form of protest, revolution or violent insurgency). Tilly argues that these interactions, and all those on the continuum, between citizens and the state, whether peaceful or violent, contribute to a relationship that either moves in the direction of democratisation (for example through successive compromises between the government and opposition groups), or toward de-democratisation (for example through heavy-handed or violent state action against citizens, or civil war). To this end, government becomes more or less “functioning” depending on the direction of travel.





How then does this apply to the Afghan case? One might assume that Afghanistan fits into the 'weak state capacity' end of the scale and is perhaps heading toward de-democratisation as the electoral process unravels. But is it that straightforward? While Tilly's method of characterising the process of democratisation is useful and sheds light on the importance of the state-citizen relationship, it relies on certain definitions of 'citizen' and 'state' that seem too rigid to apply to the Afghan case. Both terms derive from the 18th-century liberal politics of Locke and J.S. Mill that focus primarily on the rights and duties of individual citizens - whereas for most of recent Afghan history - at least since the beginning of the first Durrani ruler's reign in 1747 - the connections that have defined the country's political trajectory have been between entire communities (tribes, subtribes, ethnic groups, families) and successive individual rulers, with little space for either individual citizens or state institutions. This has seen some change, under some regimes, over the years, particularly but not exclusively in urban areas - and yet still many important political deals and negotiations are made between the president and elites on behalf of the groups they supposedly represent. This is not to say that individual citizen interests are not important or should not be protected: but oftentimes they are enveloped within broader community consensus.

Here lies the central problem with democracy-building attempts in Afghanistan thus far. International agencies have approached democratisation much in the same way as Tilly does, albeit with less nuance and sophistication: with a focus on the need to enhance state-citizen connections.

Enhancing service delivery through building capacity in line ministries, funding the activities of civil society organisations, training political parties, and of course putting vast sums of money into holding elections are just some of many



examples. And yet in a context where 'state' and 'citizen' don't really correlate with their western definitions, this has been difficult. For all the efforts to promote service delivery, services remain inadequate and often attributed to international agencies rather than to the government (see for example the case of the National Solidarity Programme or NSP[iii]). Civil society groups are more often vehicles for the advancement of certain high profile individuals and their ethnic/sub-ethnic groups rather than organisations for the promotion of general public interest. Parties remain ethnically motivated and lack issues-based platforms or ideologies to distinguish one from another. And every election held since 2004 has been a platform for elite negotiation and power-sharing rather than an expression of the will of the people.



Shah Marai, AFP/Getty Images

Why is this the case? First, because rather than establish wholeheartedly new democratic institutions in the Bonn Process, international and Afghan officials opted for an amalgamation of old and new practices - hence a constitution very



similar to that of Zahir Shah in the 1960s, successive Loya Jirgas, and no space for political party activity. This has led to the promulgation of parallel institutional cultures[iv], where old and new political institutions function alongside one another but no new 'rules of the game' are fully implemented. Democratic elections have been successively trumped by elite bargaining, at the national and local levels - for example in 2009, 2010 and 2014. Second, are the vast differences between urban and rural connections to the government. While in cities, citizens expect service provision from and relatively ease of access to government bodies, many rural communities have little to no connection with the state and do not desire any: state interference in community affairs is often seen as a negative phenomenon, with the state itself considered predatory and corrupt. Talk of greater connection to the government is often met with quizzical expressions and questions as to why this would be necessary.

And third, there is the question of tax. While gross government revenues (from income tax, sales, rents, etc.) have been increasing in Afghanistan as a percentage of GDP (currently standing at about 11 per cent),[v] these figures do not represent revenues collected from each individual family or group across the country but derive from businesses, rents and elite urban wages. Income tax is charged to individual citizens in Afghanistan but only on wages above 12,500 Afghanis (GBP 135) per month[vi]. For the majority of rural Afghanistan, for whom subsistence farming still occupies the majority of time and labour, there is no income tax. Outside aid and military spending equal approximately 90 per cent of Afghanistan's USD 20 billion GDP. While this figure does not mean that aid actually *accounts* for 90 per cent of GDP, and is not widely cited by Afghans, there is nonetheless a widespread perception among rural communities that government revenues are simply supplied by external sources. This creates further distance still between the pockets of individual citizens and families, and the state coffers. Little connection through tax means little accountability - why should it matter how the government spends its money when it's not our money anyway? Without this critical vehicle as an incentive to hold the government to account, there are few demonstrations, few examples of public outcry, certainly



no Arab Spring, and essentially, no democracy. Or at least, no democracy as Tilly or international democracy promoters would define it.

And yet, does democracy need to be defined on these terms? In a sense yes: few have argued successfully with Tilly, for a start - and while context is important, so are the universal principles of universal suffrage and popular control over resource distribution on which modern democratic politics is based.

But it is a fallacy to think that a liberal, western model of democratic politics can simply be carbon-copied in post-conflict areas where state-builders wish to create legitimate, 'functioning' governments to keep the peace. Understandings of how democracy emerges should be inseparable from understandings of the local political landscape.

Elections and how they have played out in Afghanistan provide a case in point. Over the last decade, elections have become very much a part of the local political environment in which they are taking place, and have been adapted in many places to fit existing methods of making decisions in the community (for more on this, see, [Derailing Democracy in Afghanistan](#)). Bloc voting occurs in many communities, where a suitable candidate is chosen ahead of time and everyone votes accordingly. Voting occurs along ethnic, tribal, family, wider-family, student union, and civil society group lines - and is not always 'issues-based'. But while some recent reports have pointed this out to be a problem (see [here](#)), where the 'Afghan way' doesn't fit with our own, western notions of what elections should look like (i.e. people making their own, independent choices about who to vote for), it could be argued that these practices actually increase the legitimacy of the voting process for many Afghans, who are able to counter the somewhat alien majority-rule idea with a more familiar, consensus-based approach. And this perspective conveniently overlooks the way that bloc voting along ethnic or social



group lines is standard practice in our own countries. Of course, there is a need to ensure that people are still able to cast votes that differ from the community consensus - but as long as individual voting rights are protected at the same time as bloc voting occurs, what's the issue? And does it matter that it occurs along ethnic lines in some cases? Why is this any less representative of people's interests?



This example also serves as a reminder that the high turnout to the first polls in April 2014 shouldn't be confused with a public embrace of western liberal principles. Sure, they were a sign that people supported the democratic practice of electing a leader, but elections and liberal democracy are not seen by all Afghans to go hand in hand. Indeed, many people we spoke to in a research project in 2010 (see here) were quite happy with the idea of elections as a means to transfer power, meanwhile associating democracy with western imperialism and the imposition of liberal values on a Muslim nation. Others talked about the need to contain democracy within an Islamic framework. There is still a lot to be debated among Afghans themselves as to what this means in practice, and the kind of government they see functioning best to combine democratic and Islamic



practices. While there may be room for international actors to work with civil society and the new government toward improving fiscal accountability mechanisms, access to justice and protection for women's rights, for example, these issues must be identified as priorities by Afghans themselves. Otherwise, they will simply pay lip service to a superficial set of values that citizens themselves are not prepared to defend.

To draw some tentative conclusions from these thoughts, then: first, democracy is more than anything about functioning government, but that functioning government is difficult if not impossible to establish without contentious interaction between citizen and state over time (and not, as the NYT authors would have us believe, in the blink of an eye following a flawed presidential election).

And second, state-citizen interaction may look different in Afghanistan to western ideals of that interaction - and any international plans to further encourage it need to be firmly rooted in understandings of the local political environment.

References

[i] New York Time, August 25th 2014. 'Afghanistan's Moment of Reckoning'. Editorial Board. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/26/opinion/afghanistans-moment-of-reckoning.html?_r=0

[ii] See Tilly, Charles, and Tarrow, Sidney (2007). *Contentious Politics*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers; and Tilly, Charles (2007). *Democracy*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.



[iii] The NSP was one of the Afghan government's National Priority Programmes, established in 2003 and spearheaded by then minister for Finance and former World Bank anthropologist Ashraf Ghani, It stipulated the formation of local level elected councils (Community Development Councils or CDCs) that were tasked with deciding on appropriate local development projects that would then be paid for by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).. Facilitating Partners - international and national NGOs - had the role of assisting the CDCs to develop proposals for submission to the MRRD. In many cases, project funds were delivered, but in others, there were delays, and problems with the equipment purchased. Furthermore, while most communities were aware that the government of Afghanistan was in some way connected to the NSP project, few actually attributed a specific service-provider role to the government as a result. For more, see Inger W. Boesen, 2004. 'From Subjects to Citizens: Local Participation in the National Solidarity Programme'. Kabul: AREU, p59 (and throughout).

[iv] Kandiyoti, Deniz. 2007. 'Political fiction meets gender myth: post-conflict reconstruction, "democratization" and women's rights' in Cornwall, A., E. Harrison and A. Whitehead, *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*. London: Zed Books: pp191-200..

[v] According to World Bank estimates, cited in Cordesman, Anthony H. 2013. 'The Afghan War in 2013: Meeting the Challenges of Transition, Volume II'. Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies. ppVIII-IX and throughout.

[vi] 2005 Afghanistan Tax Law, Ministry of Finance.



Afghan Elections: the pen, the gun and the slippage between

Nichola Khan
September, 2014



Afghanistan's Presidential elections were scheduled to coincide with the withdrawal of U.S. and foreign troops and Afghanistan's first democratic transfer of power. The first round on 5 April resulted in two frontrunners, the ethnic Tajik Abdullah Abdullah with 45 per cent of the ballots, and the Pashtun Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai with 31.5 per cent. Because neither candidate secured over 50%, a second round was scheduled for 14 June, to be followed by the announcement of the new President on 22 July.

The run-up to the first round resulted in eight candidates, and a reshuffling of political and military alignments. Some groups split themselves between support for Abdullah or for Ghani—former mujahideen leaders Sayyaf and Hekmatyar being two cases in point. Ghani appointed his vice Presidential candidate the notorious Uzbek warlord, General Dostum. This occurred amidst a resilient



Taliban insurgency as 51,000 US-led combat troops were scheduled to leave Afghanistan, and disputes between lawmakers over the complete withdrawal of forces by 2017. The Taliban boycotted the elections. They opposed Abdullah because he agreed to sign bilateral security agreements for U.S troops to stay beyond 2014 (Ghani also agreed to sign), with Pakistan over the disputed Durand Line border, and for promoting a Persian-speaking minority elite largely alien to Afghanistan's Pashtun majority. They opposed any peace process unless they could hold talks with any new government, a proposal Obama refused.

After the second round put Ghani ahead with 56.4% (Abdullah 43.5%), hundreds of serious fraud allegations were lodged.



In many districts, including Kabul, no ballot papers arrived. Children boosted votes in many areas. On election day, hundreds of uploads of violence and irregularities were posted online. These showed children shot dead, people with fingers cut off, private militias at large, and Afghan National police officers struggling to keep control. Abdullah threatened to establish a

parallel government if the fraudulent votes were not withdrawn.

Although by 7 July both parties had agreed on identifying illegitimate votes, the next day Abdullah declared himself the winner in an emotional speech to supporters. On 11 July US Secretary of State John Kerry visited Kabul and threatened to withdraw US aid if both candidates did not endorse a UN proposal



to audit 8000 polling stations. They agreed.

Violence, security incidents, and killings increased throughout July. They delayed the vote audit, and the announcement of the new President. On 5 July around 400 fuel tankers were burnt at a logistics compound in Paghman district in Kabul, targeted by the Taliban because they supplied foreign troops. On 15th around 100 people died in a suicide attack in Paktika, a Taliban stronghold. The Taliban claimed it was a retaliatory attack by Abdullah's men following his election defeat there. 17 July saw a five hour assault on Kabul airport. Washington expressed concern. On 29th Karzai's cousin was killed at his home in Kandahar.

I conduct research with Afghan migrants in the UK and Pakistan. Many drew inevitable comparisons with the nineteenth-century Great Game, when Britain fought the Russian Bear in Afghanistan at the frontier of the Raj; a conflict revisited in the Soviet-Afghan war (1977-88). Given Russia's annexation of Crimea this March, Russia's subsequent incursions into Ukraine, and Putin's refusal to respect Ukraine's sovereignty, such comparisons seemed prescient.



Abdullah was an erstwhile commander of Ahmed Shah Massoud ('The Lion of Panjshir') in the Soviet war. Massoud fought Soviet forces, he also allied with them against U.S supported groups such as Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami, and subsequently the Taliban. Abdullah has nurtured strong connections with Russia. As Russian looked stronger in Ukraine, the US eased pressure on the Taliban; when Russia's position weakened in Ukraine, it toughened its stance. The US is wary of a strong Afghan-Russian connection. If Russia has power in Ukraine, it is less likely to support a pro-Russian Abdullah. Identifying boundaries between 'two' sides is difficult when there much switching sides, including by the national police, and Abdullah supports Russia *and* the US. This complicates the traditional conflict between the orthodoxies of modernism and fundamentalism, expressed in the apothegm of a choice between *kalam ow kalashnikov* (the gun or the pen).

My interlocutor Nawroz frustratedly complained: 'If Abdullah is the gun, and Ghani the pen, in reality they are friends. Neither is working for Afghanistan.'



The Cold War ended in 1989. Now Russia is politically interested in former USSR countries, not Afghanistan, and economically in East Asia. Afghanistan's big investor is China. China has invested in copper mines and oil fields- and built infrastructure. They did the same in almost every developing country, and massively in neighbouring Pakistan. They have maintained political distance for fear of retaliation from the Taliban, and of inciting China's Muslim minority. A pressing issue is security. What will the Chinese government do if a warlord approaches one of its large mines demanding a bribe; then another; then the Taliban? Send troops? Target local leaders? These are big issues. In Pakistan, Chinese investments are safer because they use their own police and army officers. Would this be acceptable in Afghanistan? These days security is increasingly handed to private contractors, with terrible results.

Another major player is India, with strategic goals to create a strong buffer for relations with Pakistan. Pakistan traditionally supported the Afghan Taliban, although the killing of Pakistani forces in Kunduz in 2001 initiated the break-up Afghan and Pakistani Taliban groups, and the Taliban has posed domestic problems for Pakistan. Otherwise, the US is clearly opting out. Afghanistan has been a drain. The USA prefers Myanmar, Korea and Taiwan—where there are



trade, finance, skills, and markets to win. It will retain troops to contain attempts by Iran to expand its regional or military influence. Britain has little interest. Britain's foreign policy is to attract investments at home.

Unlike when the Taliban destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001, the 2008 Chinese contract to develop a copper mine on Mes Aynak, one of the largest archaeological sites for Buddhist artefacts in Central Asia, passed relatively unnoticed.

August began with violent protests at the IEC's recount method, causing delays. On 7th John Kerry returned to Kabul. Both sides agreed to collaborate in a 'National Unity government', in which the 'loser' will assume the post of chief executive. On 3 September pro-Abdullah governors threatened to establish a parallel government if Abdullah lost. The 2014 NATO summit began without a new President, but a commitment to continue NATO's 'Enduring Partnership with Afghanistan'. The recount ended on 5 September, with Ghani ahead. Ghani *looks set* to assume Presidency of the 'unity government'. Ghani has a Phd in Anthropology from Colombia University, worked for the World Bank, the UN, and Western universities.

Many perceive democracy as an alternative violence, and the new 'American' government the result of intervention following this summer's violence.

Thus, 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.



Additionally, it is unclear how much support Ghani has amongst Afghanistan's Pashtuns (the Taliban aside, whose 'resurgence' may be weaker than they claim)—other than an ethnic choice over the Tajik Abdullah. Governing Afghanistan will require the acumen to appease or co-opt the warlords' power, strengthen parliament whilst stemming corruption, and ensure Afghanistan's interests alongside those of India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, the US and China.





Moral Geography of US/Mexico borderlands: space- and place-making at the edge of America #BORDERS

Lawrence Taylor
September, 2014



The creation and maintenance of a national border is an act of political geography. The building of a wall or fence on that same border is an act of moral geography.

A wall does far more than strengthen or underscore the distinction between one political entity and another. While a border may or may not be a relatively static political and legal fact, the erection of a wall or fence is an action that responds to other actions - in this case to an actual, or feared, uncontrollable deluge of border crossers and drugs: criminality in the form of people and commodities. The wall is meant to stop them, but also to communicate both a readiness to act and fear on



the part of the builders. It is inevitably interpreted as a moral statement: that the builders have something important, worth protecting, and threatened by others from outside: not just resources, but a way of life based on shared values. It is border not just between the United States and Mexico, but between Order and Chaos, Good and Evil.

The fantasy of shared values of course breaks down within the walls wherever internal boundaries and barriers subtle or physical are erected, such as in gated communities. And the fantasy that the threat is from without can only be maintained by ignoring the fact that the flow of such illegal people and commodities is a function not just of the desire of the desperate and ambitious south of the border, but of business and consumers “protected” by the wall. A variety of businesses want, or even need to survive, cheap, unofficial labour. A large number of people want drugs, as well as lower prices for legitimate commodities produced by illegitimate labour.

If there is no diminution in the desire fueling this movement, the consequences of draconian enforcement are simply to raise the costs of crossing, thereby both increasing the violence of organized criminals involved in moving drugs, and attracting those same people into the increasingly lucrative people smuggling business.



Ironically, dramatically heightened enforcement - a performance intended to produce and protect a moral geography of purity - directly aids in the production of an opposite space by the Narcotrafficientes across the line. Fueled by the undiminished desire of both Mexican immigrants and American employers and consumers, and by

the escalating value of the trade created by enforcement, the Narco fiefdoms control territory by production of their own moral space, animated by a culture of violence, terror, family loyalty, and sometimes folk religious practice. These worlds, and the casualties they produce, of course, give added credence to the perception that chaos and evil lay beyond the wall.

Meanwhile, the moral geography of both the US and Mexican States are also challenged by their respective citizenry. South of the border, mass demonstrations drawing attention to the moral failure of the Mexican state occupy central spaces in the capital, while on the US side voluntary associations of citizens equally disenchanted with State performance, alternatively build their own walls and fences, or place water tanks in the desert for passing migrants. In all cases the landscape is inscribed by movement, the deployment of material culture, and a stream of discourse, all in the service of fleeting or more persistent place- and space-making: performing alternative moral geographies. (for further discussion of these and related issues see papers on academia.edu).



Introduction - Thread on SUSTAINABILITY

Fiona Murphy
September, 2014



Even though the green shoots of economic recovery have started to sprout across the globe, the impact of austerity, long standing wars and conflicts, and the environmental crisis loom large for empathic, concerned global citizens. That we are living in an ‘unsustainable,’ even dystopic world may even seem an understatement for those of us paying close attention to recent events between Israel and Palestine or within the Ukraine (to name but two of many recent crises). Words like ‘recovery,’ ‘well-being’ and ‘sustainability’ abound in notional rhetorics about how the world can and should be a better place. Through the lens of a world in crisis, however, these words bring little peace or offer few resolutions.

In our first post on ‘Sustainability’ this week, [Gregor Claus](#) from Queens University Belfast, addresses just this concern with the complexities of the relationship between the term or construct that is ‘sustainability’ and the issue of social justice. Through the novel metaphor of the ‘impossible hamster,’ Gregor



unpacks the idea of ‘actually existing unsustainability’ and what that might actually achieve in real and practical terms for the world we inhabit today.



The practicalities or ambitions of sustainable living for ordinary citizen-consumers are indeed often quite challenging. There is a growing movement to support these ambitions at differing societal levels from community gardens to large scale sustainable city projects. Large scale multi-disciplinary research projects examining sustainable living have, as a result, become widespread. In our next post, [Pierre McDonagh](#) of Dublin City University, introduces us to one such ethnographic research project which examines the advent of the Electric Vehicle and its advocates.

Following on from this, Pierre’s close colleagues [John Schouten](#) and [Diane Martin](#) from Aalto University in Finland continue with their reflection from this exciting research project offering important insights into the relationship between consumer choice and sustainability. These are small important steps which allow ordinary citizen-consumers to begin to think about sustainable living.



Our final blog post, however, moves us away from the ambitions of sustainable living back into a world where some decree the real impact of our unsustainable living lies-at the border. [Lawrence Taylor](#) of NUI Maynooth is specifically talking about the US-Mexican border, thus mapping out a key and resonant argument about the notion of moral geography and the spaces that divide 'them' from 'us.'

We finish this week with the notion of the border (the unsustainability of our current world orientation) because sustainability itself is ultimately a border concept, one depending on a range of intersecting (but yet often competing) spaces to come properly together in order to secure a better world for all of its citizens.

Electric Love - sustainability

John Schouten
September, 2014



Years ago, when we were still working as ethnographers for Harley-Davidson Inc., it was common for us to hear riders talk about how much fun their bikes were, or how liberating, or how essential to their mental health. What we almost never heard was how useful they found their motorcycles to be, or how much they saved on gasoline by commuting on their Harleys. This probably comes as no surprise, and yet, and yet ... when we think of electric vehicles, why do our thoughts immediately turn to issues of range, price and carbon dioxide equivalents? When we read about battery-powered electrics why does the discussion go directly to the environment?

Of course atmospheric carbon and the global greenhouse are important considerations when making decisions about transportation. So is price. And so are other issues of practicality. But if we've learned anything from two decades worth of ethnographic research in the motorcycle and automotive industries it's this: The heart often overrules the head when it comes to actual purchase decisions. When a woman or a man falls head over heels in love with a motor vehicle, it's not because of its efficiency or its trunk space. More likely it's



because of the curve of the sheet metal, the feel of g-forces under acceleration, the caress of leather, the purity of surrounding sound, or the way she imagines others see her as she's gliding past or blowing by.



When we began collecting stories and experiences in the world of electric vehicles we did so with the sense that, from a marketing standpoint, the real message may be more in the sizzle than the steak. Dozens upon dozens of studies, after all, confirm an intransigent gulf between consumers' attitudes and their behaviors with respect to green products. They know what they should do; they say they will; and then they don't. Well reasoned 'shoulds' fail to move them. What's more, marketing research, coming from a dominant position in psychology, can't seem to see past its cognitive biases.



We decided to let consumers talk to us about the real payoffs from operating electrics. What we learned came from their embodied experiences. From builders of electric race bikes we learned that, yes, green is probably the inevitable color of motorcycling's future, but speed and handling are their passion, and electrics deliver.

From a professional videographer we learned that the electric motorcycle isn't only a gas to ride, it also serves as a smooth and silent camera mount. From Tesla Model S buyers we learned that, yes, emissions matter, but status and distinction are the real keys, along with luxury and fun. From users of electric snowmobiles in Lapland we learned that quietness in the pristine woods was the primary motive for ditching internal combustion.



In a retirement golfing community in Oregon we pulled together some wine and cheese, and our seventy-five-year-old informant called a handful of friends to come talk about their electric golf cars. This community permits residents to drive their golf cars on the streets. We organized the impromptu focus group after our informant told us that she almost never drove her car any more.

She took her golf car to visit neighbors.

She took it to the beauty salon, the post office, the pharmacy and the liquor store. In effect, she was using it as a battery-powered car. Did her friends do the same? They did. So with no more than a few phone calls we had a group of seven seniors, aged from sixty-something to ninety-two, sitting around a dining table talking fondly about their electric golf cars. After a while Diane asked if there was anything that would improve their golf-car experiences. With a twinkle in her eye



the ninety-two-year-old said, “More speed!” Diane asked them if they could sum up their feelings about their golf cars in a word. “Fun” and “Liberating” were the words people agreed on—not coincidentally the same words you’d hear from a Harley-Davidson owner talking about her bike.

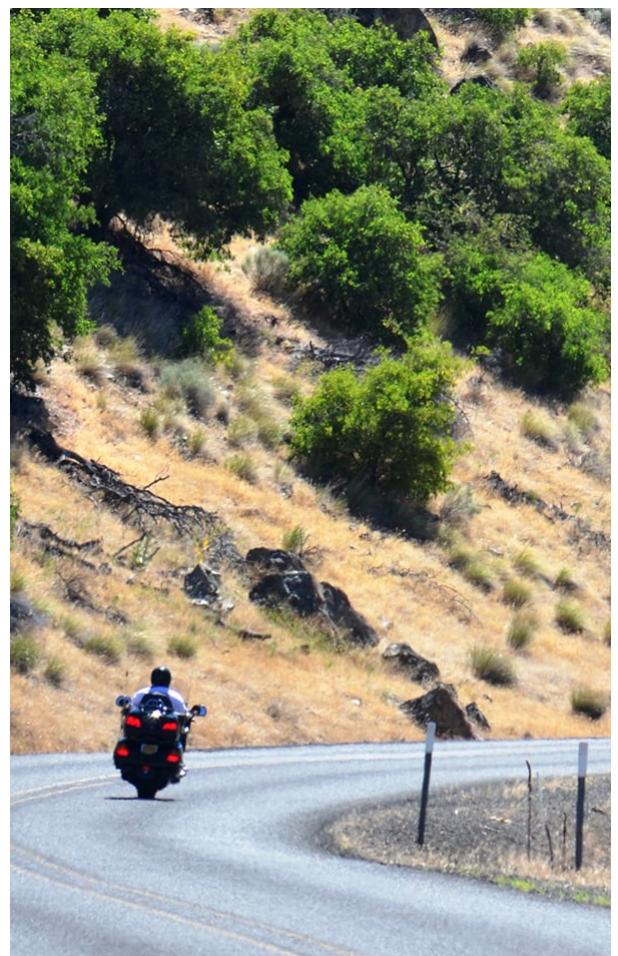


A colleague of mine owns a Tesla Roadster. It’s a sporty little two-seater designed by technology nerds and built on a Lotus platform. One day my colleague asked if I would like to drive it. He picked me up on campus and drove to a café in the countryside for lunch. After a leisurely meal he put me in the driver’s seat. After accelerating tentatively through a few tight turns and feeling glued to the road I got to a place where the road straightened out, and I pressed the accelerator with commitment. You can know the statistics. You can have a cognitive sense of what it means to go from a standstill to a hundred kilometers per hour in four seconds. I could extrapolate from past experiences on fast motorcycles.



But nothing prepared me for the experience that followed. With not a millisecond of lag time, before I could mentally brace myself for it, my body was rammed back into the seat. My internal organs grabbed onto my spine and held on for dear life. I imagine my pupils dilated and my sphincters slammed shut.

Then with a touch of the brake it was over. Except that it wasn't. That was two years ago and I've never lost the sense of exhilaration I got from those two or three seconds of transcendent speed. Would I buy a Tesla Roadster if I could afford it? Damn right I would. It would be completely irrational, and in our Downtown Helsinki neighborhood it would create nothing but headaches. But I'd do it. Tesla no longer builds the Roadster. And I couldn't afford one anyway. But ... an electric motorcycle? An electric bicycle? Maybe. When I think about it, it's hard to justify. But when I tap back into the experience of that single burst of acceleration I realize how weak my rational side becomes when my body and emotions are really engaged.



Electric vehicles are a rational choice for consumers, for cities and for the environment, but we suspect that the future of sustainable transportation may not hinge on its sustainability.



And then my heart went zoom...

Pierre McDonagh
September, 2014



In June of this year, we hosted the [Myth and the Market meeting](#) in Carlingford, County Louth, a place which is reinventing the old railway track as a cycle and walk way in this part of Ulster. For three days the myth of the Mercedes Benz was collectively ours as the family friendly sponsor Colm Lindsay Cars lent us a Mercedes Benz 350 CLS CDI to transport VIP speakers from and to Dublin Airport. All passengers felt special beyond belief and relaxed into the comfort of the vehicle and this made me chuckle; desire overwhelmed the ambiguities of [Hewer](#) and Brownlie's (2007) debadging car aficionados. Previously [Prothero](#) and [Fitchett](#) (2000) have emphasised the need to green the commodity form into a greener way of being and this Merc presented the best illustration of the challenge that lies ahead one that [Martin](#) and [Schouten](#) (2012) want to become



the norm of Sustainable Marketing.

A current band of like-minded professors (McDonagh, Martin, Murray, Prothero, Schouten and Vaisto) are all immersed in the Electric Vehicle project. This team of EV scholar-aficionados have embarked on a project that has taken them across California, Arizona, Finland, Switzerland and soon into Africa working with [Professor Herman Musahara](#) of the [Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa \(OSSREA\)](#) to unpack the conditions needed for more people to experience what one respondent describes of the Zero motorbike to be 'like flying a magic carpet!'.





As Carl from the Zero dealership in LA explains this is great for people new to bikes, “I think one of the biggest appeals has been first time motorcycle riders. Now they get the chance to join the club, because it’s a new transmission in these bikes. That’s one of the first appeals—it comes with the ‘fun’ aspect of these bikes. And then, also, the efficiency of the bikes, the fact that it’s not something you have to worry about when you buy a motorcycle that it requires a little bit of tinkering sometimes. It requires knowledge of the vehicle. All this is eliminated when you buy a Zero. You just need to buy it and ride it”.

The EV work is inspired by an integrative and multidisciplinary ethos and the research team are talking to manufacturers, dealers and end users of a range of electric vehicles to learn from their experiences. We want to connect with engineers and vehicle designers as well as policy makers and city planners who are interested in accelerating the adoption and mainstreaming of electric vehicles. We especially feel meaningful change can be created in areas where there is high density of population across the globe to help better respond to the provisioning for sustainable mobility both from industry and those providing the infrastructure required for electric vehicles.

A key challenge then is making the end user desire the electric vehicle as part of their daily consumption and identity forming practices. We are seeking to partner with other social scientists, interested non-government organizations, industry partners and those actively seeking greener forms of mobility as an exciting form of living for people everywhere; we are looking at electric vehicles in daily use, in the luxury car market, auto racing, electric motorcycles, use of electric leisure vehicles for pleasure such as snow mobiles or for non-intended uses (for example the golf-cart-as-electric-car in retirement communities); this is all with the purpose of trying to better understand people and their relationships with the electric





vehicle.

For now our hearts are going zoom, once the work is done we hope a lot more across the globe will go zoom as well.

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Sustainability, social justice and how to make the world a better place

Gregor Claus
September, 2014



When talking about issues of sustainability it seems it is impossible to avoid initial confusion, given how much of a buzzword it has become. Everyone seems to have something to say about it, but looking at the meanings attributed to sustainability it is hard not to conclude that different people from different fields mean very different things by it.

With some knowledge of the relevant fields it is quite obvious, for example, to notice that business people talking about ‘sustainable growth’ and environmentalists speaking about ‘sustainable economies’ attribute not just opposing, but downright opposite/contradictory meanings to the word. Indeed for a radical environmentalist, the mere idea of ‘sustainable growth’ is nothing but an oxymoron, as for them it is impossible to indefinitely sustain growth, the reason



for this being easy to illustrate with the idea of the [impossible hamster](#).

Because of those issues over the very meaning of the word in everyday use some environmentalists, such as Dr. John Barry of [QUB](#), have decided to altogether abandon the term and instead have started talking about the reality of 'Actually Existing Unsustainability' and about the need to reduce unsustainability in our socio-economic system. They think that any talk of achieving sustainability is nothing but a mirage that perpetuates a system the very foundations of which (the economic model) are not sustainable. In the words of Bluhdorn and [Welsh](#), much of political and economic talk of sustainability today is primarily concerned with the 'paradox of sustaining the unsustainable'. Bluhdorn coined for this phenomenon the phrase of 'simulative politics', where the public speeches and documents that politicians and business leaders produce on a regular basis are meant to project awareness of and action with regards to sustainability, while at best taking marginal steps to get away from fundamentally unsustainable behaviour.





Being somewhat wary of giant hamsters devouring the globe I cannot help but agree with Bluhdorn and Welsh's analysis when it comes to the common use of the word 'sustainability' in the media as presented by politicians and economists. In a sense their behaviour is nothing but a logical consequence of the socio-economic inertia of globalised capitalism. It cannot accept the conclusion -that current economic systems are largely incompatible with sustainability- that is both implicit and explicit to the -with regards to sustainability- commonly referenced Bruntland report (1987), which states that

"[...] the "environment" is where we all live; and "development" is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable. Further, development issues must be seen as crucial by the political leaders who feel that their countries have reached a plateau towards which other nations must strive. Many of the development paths of the industrialized nations are clearly unsustainable. And the development decisions of these countries, because of their great economic and political power, will have a profound effect upon the ability of all peoples to sustain human progress for generations to come."

Barry's perspective therefore makes sense if one wishes to address unsustainability issues from within existing -democratic- political power structures. But the question has to be asked, if that approach of trying to reduce unsustainability can work anywhere near fast enough to help prevent some of the most severe scenarios related to the threat of rising global average temperatures of above 2°C leading to high risk climate change (not to mention issues of mass species extinctions, multiple resource bottlenecks and pollution).

Especially, when in fact the most recent IPCC report has switched its focus from risk prevention towards climate change mitigation and even adaptation, given the slow international progress with regards to achieving CO₂ emission-reduction targets. But even re-naming the goal 'mitigation' does not change the fact that the changes to our socio-economic systems required to have a liveable world in 50-100 years are relatively ambitious, or arguably even revolutionary.



Reducing 'unsustainability' in this context seems conceptually to be too much of a 'small-steps' approach from that point of view, even when individual measures taken to reduce unsustainability can truthfully be described as revolutionary in their own right.

But it does not provide a positive alternative vision to the existing growth and consumption oriented system, and lacks in short a fundamentally different vision of what a global sustainable society might practically look like.

And 'sustainable' in this context is meant with regards to social, economic and environmental sustainability, not just at a local but a global level. Only a system that rises to this challenge will be able to get the support and cooperation of enough people to have a hope in mitigating and adapting to the serious problems even controlled climate change will throw at us as a species.



A number of environmental political researchers - see Dobson for example - have now recognized that any solution to environmental issues will also have to address social issues of inequality, poverty and injustice if it is to have any chance of success. After all, if one follows Maslow's basic idea of a needs hierarchy even just partially it becomes quickly obvious that a

person mentally preoccupied with day-to-day survival for themselves and their families will have little time to concern themselves with environmental issues. Even if their lives ultimately depend on environmental integrity, concerns for short-term survival will always outweigh considerations for long-term survival. Issues of environmental sustainability can therefore only be addressed if they also help solve more anthropocentric issues of social justice and inequality.

But these social issues cannot any longer be addressed exclusively at a local level. While highly developed industrial nations arguably will be able to fairly quickly



decarbonise and to adapt to the negative effects of climate change, once the issue becomes a political priority, the same cannot be said for developing nations. And many of the developing nations in the global South will be amongst those worst affected by climate change, leading to an increase in conflicts and global instability as well as refugee crises.

Given the above considerations it seems wise to consider how one might go about fundamentally transforming human society away from the in growth based capitalist model, especially since even Marx already pointed out that it never actually produced the indefinite growth it takes as its foundational premise, but rather boom and bust cycles that bring in regular intervals misery and uncertainty to vast majority of people in developed nations.

Luckily there are already a number of both practical and theoretical communities and projects across the globe that are attempting to move beyond the current orthodox economic growth paradigm and experiment with the concepts of 'steady state' and even 'degrowth' economies (for the latter see for example the upcoming ['Fourth International Conference on Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity'](#)). Prominent examples of these on the island of Ireland are the [Cloughjordan Eco-Village](#) and the Transition Town movement, following some practical ideas described by Robert Hopkins in his [Transition Handbook](#). However there is currently a lack of thorough systematic analysis of both the successes as well as shortcomings of projects like these and in how far they may be scaled up and applied to wider society beyond the small group of committed and knowledgeable activists.



In other words creating a better, sustainable world will require more than just enthusiasm in a small minority of knowledgeable people; it will require thoroughly methodological approaches that take into account the vast diversity of the human condition in material, educational and cultural wealth and take into account both current and past experiences of alternative ways of life.

How to become an Allegra “top reviewer”

Judith Beyer
September, 2014



Allegra expanded its portfolio in May 2014 with a regular section on “reviews”. We so far have had two themed review lists, the first on [“Islam”](#), the second on [“Economy”](#). All featured books were gone within only a couple of days. Since the demand was so much higher than the initial supply, I decided to curate special review sections where several authors will write reviews about the same book and ideally engage in a discussion with one another. The first upcoming special review section will be on Charles Hirschkind’s [“Ethical Soundscapes”](#), so keep an eye out! Others will follow. So far, we have published a number of individual reviews, among them [How to Accept German Reparations](#), [Sustainability in the Age of Austerity](#), and [The Other Shore](#), all reviewed by [Fiona Murphy](#) - Allegra’s “top reviewer” so far!

For anyone interested in writing reviews for Allegra (or in general), there are people out there who have accumulated a vast amount of knowledge (and reviews). Ali Julia, for example, is one of those people. She is currently Amazon’s



number one “top reviewer” with 2509 published reviews as of August 22, 2014. She also has her own product review blog; the latest entry is a review on a [“deshedding tool for pets”](#) (which would make a great AvMoFA in itself!). Ali Julia must do something right and there are several guides available online to help us find out what it is. Some of them are directed at academic reviews: like this one here from the University of North Carolina. Less lengthy, yet still very helpful are tips coming from a blog containing marketplace updates for consumers and businesses in the US. My point is: it is worth looking at these instructions aimed at e-commerce in addition to the academic ones. The tips for “top reviewers” are:

- Never write anything while upset
- Be realistic
- Talk about the entire experience
- Leave out names
- Highlight your credentials
- Address the other side of the story
- Check your spelling

Now if Julia Ali manages to stick to these points when reviewing a deshedding tool for pets, you might as well give it a try for your next academic review! How about taking a book from our upcoming themed list on “food”, coming to you on September 18th? The list will be curated by our new reviews assistant, [Sophie Allies Curtis](#), welcome Sophie!



Introducing Allegra's new reviews assistant: Sophie Allies Curtis!

Allegra
September, 2014



Welcome to our reviews assistant Sophie who has been helping Reviews Editor [Judith Beyer](#) create lists of new exciting titles, proof read upcoming reviews and assist her with correspondence.

What interested you to come and work as a reviews assistant for Allegra, Sophie?

I think Allegra is an exciting platform for the publication of anthropological ideas



and scholarship and is experimental in its approach. I completed my BA degree in Anthropology at Goldsmiths College University of London, known for its radical and creative environment/graduates and it is great to be in a similar habitat. I took a period off to focus on my daughter and when I wanted to get back into anthropology, assisting on the reviews section seemed a brilliant opportunity for doing this. I get to read reviews of the latest books being published in anthropology, learn about the new ideas and debates that are happening in the field and work with some inspiring, bright people - all from my home in leafy South London! I hope at some point to be able to re-enter the academic world and do an MA, but until then my Allegra work satisfies my need for all things anthropological.

What recent reviews have you been excited to work on?

I enjoyed reading [Fiona Murphy's](#) beautifully written [review of 'How to Accept German Reparations'](#) and it bestowed a note of hope to the recent reports of the situation between Israel and Palestine. I've also enjoyed trawling through the internet looking for new publications for Allegra's forthcoming reviews 'list', more on that to follow!

What is coming up in the reviews section that you are looking forward to?

I have just curated a new list of titles to be posted online in a few weeks on the subject of the anthropology of 'Food' to be linked in with our week on the 'Body'. Humans construct their bodies through the consumption and (non)-consumption of food so these two themes go very well together. I don't want to give too much away, but both are subjects that interest me greatly and I hope we will have lots



of people lining up to review these books as we have had with the other lists. We also have a few special review sessions planned, where it will be intriguing to see what the different reviewers 'read' into the book.



The World Meets in the Indian Ocean - Moving from a Unilateral



to a Multilateral Global Power

Christin Warkentin
September, 2014



Book Review of [Robert D. Kaplan's](#) "Monsoon. The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power"

Monsoon provides a very detailed analysis of the ongoing transition of power relations and the "disappearance of the former third world" (p. 295). The historical perspective taken in this publication shows (geo-)political enmeshments as well as the dynamics of the rise and fall of empires in the history of the Indian Ocean and the world as a whole. Every chapter explores the connection between the shrinking power of the USA and the move towards an upcoming multilateral world power. Robert Kaplan focuses on the main stages of the transition by providing the reader with historical background information as well as ongoing trends, explaining his vision of the future in which the world meets in the Indian Ocean. The transitions will not only be followed by changing ways of governance, he argues, but also by a new picture of Islam that will lose its connotation of the "enemy". Indonesia, as the state with the largest Muslim population, will become

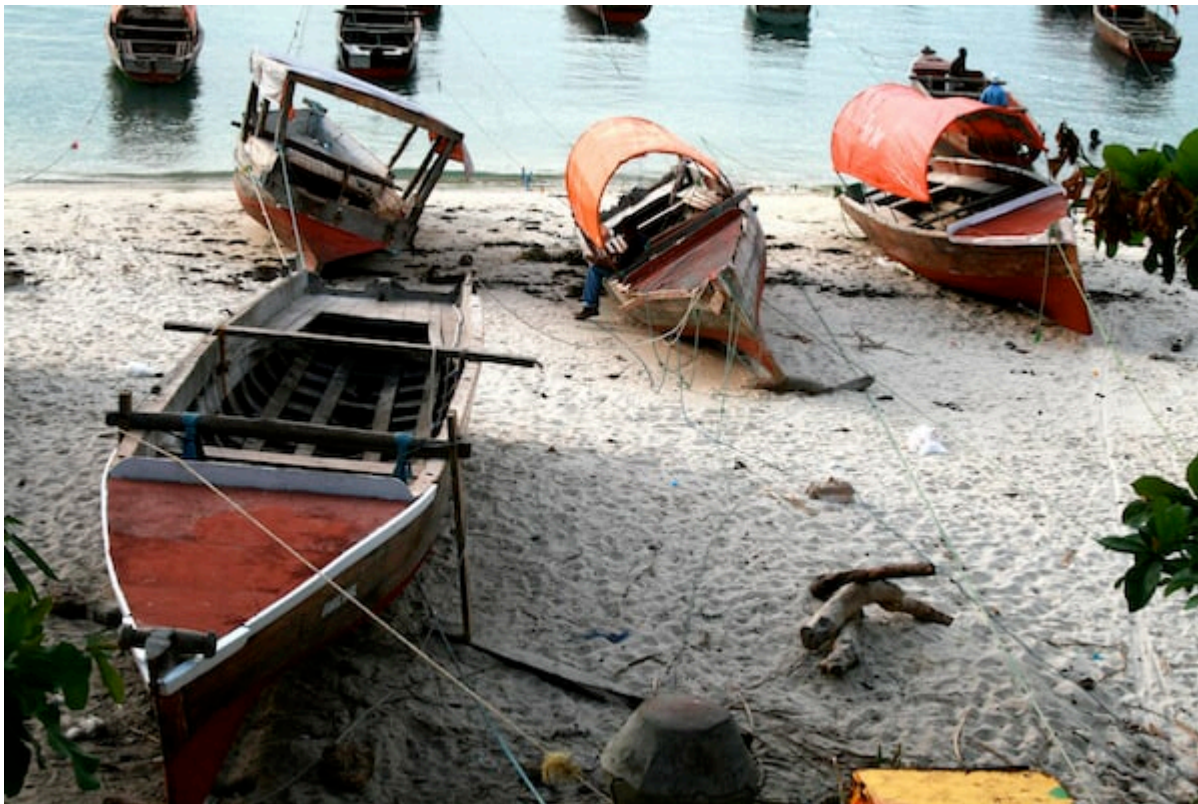


more and more important in this global political scenario.

According to Kaplan, the Indian Ocean will turn into the heart of a new geopolitical map. The author envisions a shift from a unilateral world power to multilateral power cooperation; the strategic center will move from the West to the East. This transition is caused not only by the changing economic, but also military conditions of the USA, China and India which Kaplan sees as the upcoming powerful leaders of this new world order.

The book is composed of 17 chapters; each focuses on a certain historical step of the transition and on stopovers during the journey towards an interconnected Indian Ocean. His journalistic background leads to a writing style that invites the reader to follow his detailed descriptions. It is this aspect, combined with the circumstantial historical contextualization, which demonstrates that the book is not only written for an expert audience.

The book's title Monsoon is a metaphor for a changing of world power. The monsoon as a rhythmic wind and weather system is defined by a changing of direction from the east to the west and from the west to the east. And in the same way the rhythm of global power changes.



One central feature of the new world order, Kaplan explains, is that the emerging powers will not be direct antagonists or enemies. Rather they are better described as rivals who will at some points compete and at others cooperate. This aspect is well explained in the first chapter of the book. Already the headline “China Expands Vertically, India Horizontally” shows the differing directions taken by the two, perhaps most important, rivals of the USA. This movement will predominantly take place on the sea because of the overlapping commercial and political leverages of China and India (p. 13). The sea has been important since antiquity because of trade, but there was a time of artificial separation during the Cold War and with its end the transition began. Maintaining access to the sea will become more and more crucial in order to build alliances with rivals and to prevent trading obstacles (p. 16). To balance China’s expanding economic and military power, India would have to cooperate with countries such as the USA, Japan and Singapore.



The starting point for Kaplan's historical review of the steps of transition towards a new era of global power is the predominance of Omani merchants in the Indian Ocean. They used the knowledge of the rhythms of the monsoon to expand their trading relations towards the east. These merchants were the ones who brought Islam to South and Southeast Asia. Islam coexisted with other religions of the region like Buddhism and Hinduism and pilgrimages were also used to expand trading relations (p. 28). The situation for the Omani merchants changed dramatically with the arrival of the Europeans: especially the enforced abolition of the slave trade by the British Royal Navy, which had a deep impact on them because this was the main branch of trade for the Omani (p. 38).

However, the author describes that the Indian Ocean reached its modern era with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century, which was mainly precipitated by the rediscovery of the wind system (p. 49), and it was at this point in history that the Indian Ocean changed rapidly. Since the Portuguese were Christian, they regarded Islam as an enemy and took action against Ottoman Turkey, Safavid Iran, Mughal India, and non-Muslim Ming China (p. 51). These actions were marked by hostility and brutality. While the Portuguese could not retain their predominance in the region against the Dutch and British, "they gave it [the Indian Ocean] a literary and historical unity, at least in the mind of the West" (p. 60).

But colonialism also did not stand the test of time. As mentioned above, with the end of the Cold War, India and China grew economically and increased their influence in the Indian Ocean region. Kaplan explains in numerous examples how China especially, as a country that is not geographically but geopolitically connected to the Indian Ocean, became such an important global player of the 21st century. A central aspect of this transition is its foreign policy, which is in contrast to that of the USA:

"[...] Chinese military aid does not come with lectures about human rights the



way the West's does. China does not interfere in another state's internal politics and does not tolerate interference in its own. Chinese foreign policy, without being in any way extreme or bellicose, nevertheless represents the bleakest form of realism. It indicates a new bipolarity in the world: between those states that employ human rights as part of their policy calculations and those that do not" (p. 208).

As its influence is growing and expanding, China has to be careful not to provoke India too much by getting increasingly involved in the Indian Ocean region. As the author emphasizes, India as the upcoming third largest sea power, is strongly concerned with its troubling neighboring countries. Since China invaded Tibet, India became more concerned with Chinese political strategy, which led to a deeper cooperation with the US Navy. "China was the elephant in the room that drove India and the US closer together" as Kaplan puts it metaphorically (p. 129). Keeping this aspect in mind, projects like the deepwater ports at Pakistani Gwadar (Chapter 5) and the seaport at Sri Lankan Hambantota (Chapter 11) financed and built by China became sensitive topics. The most serious Chinese involvement is taking place in Myanmar (Burma), which the author describes as the place where both superpowers collide in accordance to their moves of direction and interests (see also *Where China Meets India* by [Thant Myint-U](#), 2011). China desires Myanmar as a "vassal state" (p. 217), which should guarantee access to the Indian Ocean and provide a route for pipelines through its state territory for China. On the other side, India fears and has already faced insurgencies at its borders because of internal tensions and outbreaks of violence in Myanmar.

Another important stage where China, India and the USA have to compete and cooperate at the same time is Indonesia (Chapter 13, 14). The Strait of Malacca is the most important sea strait of the Indian Ocean for trading vessels since many different interests meet and the main goal is to keep access to this area. But the



situation can change rapidly: an increased weakening of Malaysia as well as Singapore might result in a greater dependency on China; the returning of piracy or the rise of Islamic extremists (or Buddhist, one might add in light of recent events in Myanmar and Sri Lanka), are other scenarios that could lead to a rift. Finally, environmental catastrophes such as the 2004 Tsunami could influence the transition.



Turning to the African Indian Ocean coast, Kaplan's last destination is Zanzibar, which he describes as the last frontier of the Indian Ocean. It is a frontier that - in the words of Kaplan - has to get over its post-colonial past. This implies the need for building up strong institutions that do not discriminate its inhabitants due to "race, ethnicity and other factors of identity" (p. 315). Trade appears as the most important guarantor of such a vision, as "equalizer among people and nations" (p. 317). It is already increasing in Zanzibar, which goes along with a growing middle class that is the key of the transition of the Indian Ocean:

"[...] The challenges that most people in the Indian Ocean region face are only



indirectly, if at all, related to Islamic terrorism and the military rise of China. Precisely because so many of the challenges - and hopes and dreams - of this new middle class are personal and materialistic, there will be increasing calls for better government and, yes, democracy” (p. 321).

In summary, Robert D. Kaplan focuses on the benefits of the transition to a multilateral global power with its center in the Indian Ocean. But he also mentions the shady sides of the changes: the rise of nationalism in accordance with the fear of a new hegemon as well as internal conflicts that will affect the trading system. Moreover, challenges in dealing with natural disasters, terrorism, and piracy are mentioned. But Kaplan highlights from time to time that such challenges will lead to a deeper cooperation between the nations of the globe. Global powers will have to act differently than before, because they are under increasing scrutiny by a global community (p. 323).

Besides this well prepared analysis, Kaplan works with politically sensitive categories like “third world country” (p. 144, 142, 156, 184 etc.), “hill tribes” (p. 220 etc.) and “failed state” (p. 298) which have a western-centric component. While the author in many cases describes the diversity within a country, at some points he speaks in the name of the whole nation even though it would be better to point out nuances to prevent giving the wrong impression, especially for readers who are not familiar with the history and politics of the region. However, the book remains important especially in giving an insight into a transiting world. Apart from Kaplan’s analysis of the current transition of power, the book could also be read as a plea towards the US Government to change their western-centric point of view and to look more towards the East without fearing the decline of its own power.



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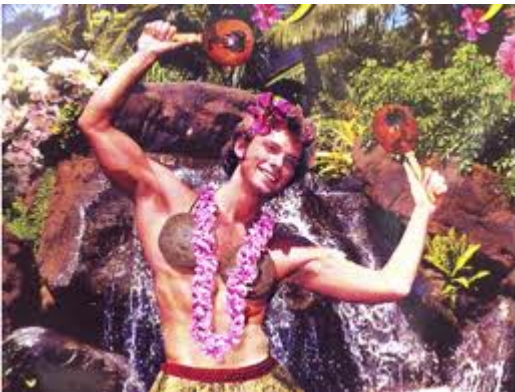
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Fall CALLING!

Allegra

September, 2014



Over the past year one of Allegra's recurring features has become its Events posts - designed to give you glimpses into the most exciting forthcoming events of our beloved discipline. This forthcoming fall seems as no deviation from the norm, as its offerings are diverse and engaging. For some of these calls for papers have already closed, but we wanted to include them anyway to meet all your spontaneous Conference Attendance Urges. As always, please ENJOY & DO send us your conference notes & papers! And remember: CONTACT US if you're organising an event that you think Allegra should feature; EMAIL: allegralab@gmail.com (And as this featured image shows, we remain in



festive mood due to Allegra's 1st birthday!)

Conferences with Open Calls for Papers:



[Strangers in Strange Lands: Mapping the Relationship between Anthropology and Science Fiction](#) 15-16 November 2014. [University of Kent, UK.](#)

The aim of this symposium is to promote the analysis of science fiction works as valid objects of anthropological inquiry, and in particular, as symptomatic traces of developing futures; thereby expanding the scope of anthropological scholarship. It is our intention to provide a platform for an energetic, multidisciplinary discussion between established scholars and postgraduate students from a diverse range of institutions and disciplines.

Deadline for abstracts: 30 August 2014. Registration is open



Social movements and contentious politics in Central and Eastern Europe 13-14 November 2014. **Hungarian Academy of Sciences**, Budapest, Hungary

The recent crisis in party politics affecting also Central and Eastern Europe and the economic crisis that sparked public contention, pose questions about civic engagement, contentious action and protest politics. The shared characteristics of political-historical development and common traits of social movements sector of Visegrad countries and CEE in a broader sense make the academic reflection necessary. Through the workshop we aim at filling several gaps in social movements research in the region. We want to have a critical reflection on the movements themselves but also on the ways they are studied and analyzed. As we are planning a publication after the workshop, we expect the participants to come with **already developed papers**.

Deadline for abstracts: 1 September 2014. Registration is open



International Conference of the Research Network on Religion, AIDS and Social Transformation in Africa (RASTA) Spirit and Sentiment - Affective Trajectories of Religious Being in Urban Africa 28-30 May 2015. [Free University of Berlin](#), Germany

Experiences and social practices of people living in urban Africa are powerfully shaped by the dynamics of affect and emotion. Moving into and residing in the vital and (economically, ethnically, socially) diverse urban centers of the continent often triggers, and is driven by, states of anxiety, insecurity and fear, as well as feelings of excitement and hope, e.g. for a better life and socio-economic liberation. This conference focuses on the multiple articulations between the wide array of affective and emotional states that living in and beyond urban Africa implies, on the one hand, and religious practices and ideas present in African cities and that may impact on the former, on the other.

Deadline for abstracts: 30 September 2014. Registration is open



[Anthropological Association of Ireland Annual Conference: Permanence and transition/transitoriness - Anthropological perspectives 6 - 7 March, 2015. University College Cork, Ireland.](#)

The **AAI 2015** call on the theme of permanence and transition looks to examine the confrontation between the study of memory and traditions and the concepts of liminality and schismogenesis. The themes of memory and tradition are central to the work of many anthropologists, especially those working within or on national frameworks. While such research is primarily concerned with the past and its recollection, legitimation, re-enactment and/or perseverance there is also a need to address the future, to encounter change as an integral, viable feature of tradition. We invite submissions that address this connection between memory, tradition and societal change. Submissions from cognate disciplines including but not limited to Area Studies, History and Sociology are also welcome.

Deadline for abstracts: 10 October, 2014. Registration is open

Forthcoming Events:



[Royal Anthropological Institute Postgraduate Conference: Whose](#)



[Anthropology is it Anyway? Connections in the modern world](#) 3-4 September 2014. [Brunel University](#), London, UK.

This conference seeks to explore the realities of ethnographic research, investigating the ways through which anthropology and its practices are affected by an increasing ‘connectedness’ between researchers and informants. In particular, the event will bring together **PhD candidates** and **early career researchers** endeavouring to highlight their experiences of anthropology-making within contexts of co-positioning of the “professional” anthropologists and their collaborators in the field.

[Anthropology For Sale](#) 19 September 2014 09:00 - 17:00. [University of Edinburgh](#), Scotland



“Roll up. Roll up. Discounted theory. Bargain ethnography. PhDs on the cheap.” What does it mean to sell something? How do you seal a sale? What is the pitch, the patter, the spiel? How do you sell with your body?

Anthropology for Sale sets out to engage with the language and rhetoric of selling, the gendered production of salespeople, the ethics and moralities of selling, the materiality of selling and the precariousness of selling in contexts of economic uncertainty. New and renewed attention to these questions put selling back into a critical anthropology and refocus our attention on ‘the vender’ as a crucial agent of contemporary social, political and economic transformations. This workshop seeks to put diverse communities of salespeople and their work back into a comparative analysis of markets and market relations, laying the groundwork for a re-analysis of selling and salespeople through a comparative ethnographic focus on personhood, morality, and practice at the moment of



market exchange.



Struggle and Style: African Youth Cultures Today *12 September 2014*,
[University of Helsinki](#), Finland

“Struggle and Style: African Youth Cultures Today” is an international symposium organized by the University of Helsinki’s discipline of Social and Cultural Anthropology in cooperation with South Africa’s Human Sciences Research Council. The symposium seeks to address current issues concerning youth cultures across Africa from an interdisciplinary perspective, and warmly welcomes contributions from across the humanities and social sciences.



[Hip Hop Studies: Global and Local](#) Social and Cultural Anthropology, [University of Helsinki](#), [Finnish Youth Studies Network](#) [Finnish Jazz and Pop Archive](#) *13 September 2014*

The symposium theme, Hip Hop Studies: Global and Local, focuses critical attention on the relationship between the globalization of hip hop and its many diverse manifestations in localities around the world, revealing hip hop's complexities and contradictions. The worldwide popularity of hip hop can be attributed to both the immense power of the global culture industry, and to the vitality of countless local 'underground' hip hop scenes. Moreover, while the globalization of hip hop has introduced common elements in popular music and youth culture worldwide, localized expressions of hip hop are often suspicious of (sub)cultural homogenization and imitation.

[International Colloquium The Thousand Names of Gaia: From the](#)



Anthropocene to the Age of the Earth Casa de Rui Barbosa, Rio de Janeiro *September 15-19, 2014*

There is a growing sentiment in contemporary culture that ‘humankind’ and ‘the world’ – the species and the planet, societies and their environments, but also subject and object, thought and being – have been for some time, though now with increasingly threatening evidence, in a nefarious cosmological conjuncture, most frequently associated with the controversial names ‘Anthropocene’ and ‘Gaia’. The first of these would indicate a new time, or rather, a new concept and experience of temporality, in which the chronological scales of human history, on the one hand, and evolutionary biology and geophysics, on the other, have come dramatically closer to each other, if not changed positions altogether – the (physical and biotic) environment changing faster than ‘society’, and the near future becoming, as a consequence, ever more unpredictable and ominous. The second term, ‘Gaia’, would name a new way of occupying and imagining space, drawing attention to the fact that our world, the Earth, having become at once fragile and confined, susceptible and implacable, has come to seem a threatening Power evoking those indifferent, arbitrary and inscrutable deities from our archaic past. Unpredictability and inscrutability, the sensation of panic in the face of our loss of control, all of which lead to a profound hopelessness¹: here, no doubt, we find novel challenges to Modernity’s proud intellectual security and intrepid historical optimism. The title of this colloquium, **The Thousand Names of Gaia: From the Anthropocene to the Age of the Earth**, is thus a reference to these two emblematic concepts in what we would call the contemporary thought of the crisis.



'TOP 10' - ALLIE turns 1!

Allegra

September, 2014



How about that - this is the week when Allegra turns 1! We've made mental notes of this week's approach for quite some time, and yet its arrival still feels surprising. This is perhaps due to some [recent heat we've been getting on a totally different issue](#), which has kept us somewhat preoccupied and also slightly puzzled. This debate will continue, yet today we give it a break by focussing on celebrating all that the past year has brought with it. Now, in doing this, we'll be setting things off with something highly 'un-Allegran', namely focus on NUMBERS! Yes, those good old digits that are in today's world so often treated as the arbitrators of 'factual' and 'important'.

Our criticism for this infatuation should come as news to no one, but let's just put all that aside in favour of the good old TOP 10 list - thus please enjoy this list of our most popular / most read posts from ALLEGRA'S FIRST YEAR!



(And just how do we know all this? It's a wonderful little program called 'Google Analytics' that gives us STAGGERING insights into our readers - that is, if only we knew how to read the stats & could be bothered to learn properly. We promise to fix this soon and offer you a proper analysis of all the information that website moderators can gather of us all as we surf the online world!)



In place number 10 is a piece called [‘Snapshots of Islam: Halal Dating in London’](#) by your humble moderator [Julie Billaud](#). The piece is linked to her ongoing project on modern Islamic legal culture in the UK (and beyond), covered at Allegra via a series of posts last fall and also connected to our ongoing thread on [#Fieldnotes](#). What does dating look like in a social scene where there are simultaneously vocal calls for foregoing dating all together and ‘just marrying’?

At number 9 we find a video of someone who Allegra readers obviously love dearly - as do we, the moderators - [namely Tim Ingold](#), published almost a year ago in October 2013. No more of this as Ingold will come up again in this list, we promise.



At number 8 we find a nice little ‘no-nonsense’ piece by [Isaac Morrison on anthropological job hunting](#) - down-to earth tips for all those trained in our noble discipline & yet determined to secure employment outside the academia (not an entirely unwise goal...).

Let’s just say this much: the popularity of this post alone speaks of the need of MUCH more training on this issue in established university curricula - we hope that people are listening!

At number 7 we find the ‘hottest’ post of the moment - and perhaps Allegra’s most controversial post to date (possibly in the exclusion of [our own take on Povinelli’s talk](#)): [Sylvain Piron’s views on why Povinelli’s keynote at Tallinn EASA 2014 was a failure](#), published on August 22, 2014. Much has been said on this post, also on our choice as moderators to post it, and much will likely be said still. The comments section - including a postscript from Piron himself - summarises the mood of this ongoing exchange.



Curiously, perhaps, just one notch higher, at number 6 we find the post that first raised an 'eyebrow or two', as the matter was phrased in the [interview that Savage Minds ran of us in January](#): our '[Savage European' take on AAA 2013](#), first published in early December 2013. Yes, reading the text in retrospect makes us wonder how we escaped more biting critique for posting at the time... Perhaps people were kinder to newcomers into the anthropological blogosphere...





Approaching ‘the top’, at number 5 we have another post by [Isaac Morrison](#), commenting also on the post-AAA2013 discussion, namely all the hype about ‘[the ontological turn](#)’, published in early 2014. Nonsense or not – it’s at least certain that debates instigated by the AAA *do* set much of the pace for current discussions in our discipline, at least in the blogosphere (with some even quick to dismiss discussions initiated by other contexts as irrelevant). Also, it is evident that people in our discipline remain keen to discuss the relevance that our hard collective work induces on the world around us.

Moving up still, in tight race for the TOP 3, at number 4 we find a delightful post – a favourite of Allegra moderators – a timeless classic called ‘[flatulanthropology](#)’ authored by the inimitable [Jon Mitchell](#) & Gavin Weston.



This post is also a testament of how Allegra operates: it was originally inspired by some careless Facebook banter, accompanied by some Twitterish-talk of ‘anthropologists being afraid of the theme’ – and there you have it: a beautiful piece of anthropological scholarship that is the epitome of being both ‘tongue in cheek’ and ‘deadly serious’.

And what do you know, it remains also one of our most popular pieces of all time. We continue to look forward to the nuanced contributions that this carefully crafted post offers to issues related to bodies, their limits – and cross-cultural takes on jokes & smells! Flatulanthropology was first published on May 16, 2014 as a part of our first ever thematic week on [#BODY](#).



Moving onto the TOP 3 then. At number 3 we find another piece by a humble Allegra moderator, namely [Miia Halme-Tuomisaari](#), and [her discussion with Carole McGranahan on doing ethnography at the CIA and on seeing 'humanity'](#), first published at the end of June, 2014. Did it all happen, exactly as is written here? Difficult to say, but this much is certain:

Was it not for Allegra, it feels impossible to think of another venue for publishing a piece in such a style - let's thus treat this post as a testament to the possibilities that the Allegra platform holds for experiments of diverse kinds.

And - TA-DAA - the TOP 2 finally. 'Lumped' together as they are both authored by the brilliant [Antonio de Lauri](#): namely [interviews with Laura Nader](#) and [Tim Ingold](#), both published toward the end of 2013. Both posts have gathered audiences in far greater numbers than the rest of our posts, whether due to mere chance of being circulated by the likes of the American Anthropological Association and Cultural Anthropology, but more likely due to their multifaceted and analytical discussions. Laura Nader discusses in particular how being an anthropologist really only requires a person to 'think like one', while Tim Ingold with de Lauri offers one of the most powerful





recent considerations on the future of academic publishing.



Our warmest thanks to the authors of these posts - as well as all the other wonderful posts that Allegra has had the privilege of publishing throughout this first year! (And let us assure that this selection based on numbers is in NO way a reflection of our take on 'excellence' or 'superiority! By contrast, we rejoice over the vast archive of 'jewels' that we have accumulated on the website over the past year, and will continue 'recycling' our treasures also in the future!).

Warm thanks for to our collaborators, supporters - and of course our fantastic editorial team! Finally, warm thanks to our shared professional field for receiving us so well - and also, for continuing to talk of us! We promise to keep up the HARD work!

