



# Let's Take it SLOW!

Allegra

November, 2013



Allegra has now been up and running for approximately three months - a period in which SO much has happened! We'll do a proper summary of things past and present soon, but now want to focus on the following: SPEED.

Many of you may recall how we first launched Allegra with our bold ['Academic Slow Food Manifesto'](#) in which we declared that "REAL research simply takes time to mature. It needs tender love and caring. A space to freely grow"; that "it needs to be digested slowly".



But are we living up to our commitment?!

This thought was introduced to us by our contributor [Shakira Bedoya Sanchez](#) who said how the only problem she has with Allegra is that things move so fast. That new things appear in Allegra so rapidly that it feels difficult to stop to reflect on the previous ones. And of course, then there is also [our Facebook page](#) - or is it vice versa even? For we are becoming increasingly aware that many if not most of you who reach Allegra the Website do so via Facebook (and isn't it interesting that we know this - more on the reasons soon too!)

It seems almost funny to think that when we first thought of Allegra (the Website), Facebook didn't really feature in our plans. Now, by contrast, we are finding great satisfaction in surfing the social media, picking up both things happening in the 'now' in scholarship. We have also found a distinct flow of our own for the bizarre, unexpected and (hopefully) funny. Again, we'll discuss our Facebook experience with more detail soon, and for now merely agree: it definitely adds a sense of speed to the Allegra experience.

Admittedly running Allegra also requires quite a bit of time. The best compliment we have gotten in this respect is when people ask us just how we find the time to do it all. At times we wonder too.

With all this brought together, it seems like the right time to let things cool down a bit - to CHILL, to give us all a chance to catch our breath, and relish the highlights of what has appeared so far. Thus this week will form Allegra's first 'Virtual Retreat of Slow Food for Thought' (AVRoSLfT) (and yes, we have our reasons for creating these obscure acronyms, in case you are wondering). During this week we will feature things that have previously appeared in Allegra, in the



spirit of giving them the slow digestion that they deserve and need.

We are setting things going by reminding everyone - us as well as you - of just what all we proclaimed when everything started. Thus please enjoy Academic Slow Food Manifesto - REDUX!

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## **ACADEMIC SLOW FOOD MANIFESTO**

More more more!

This constant pressure to write more.

More of what?

Slogans, catch phrases?

Analysis for tid-bit quotations?

The same-old, same-old?

They want to stuff our brain

with indicators,

guidelines,

readily-chewed soundbites

impact and

expected outcomes.

That is not stuff of real academics!



That is the stuff of auditing  
of successful annual reporting  
Signs of yielding to extra-academic pressures.  
We reclaim the space for the real pursuit  
of unknown horizons  
Of revery, philosophising  
and mind-wondering  
We want words, imagination, poetry!  
Things impossible to report,  
but only thus with real meaning.  
But like slow food  
REAL research simply takes time  
to mature  
It needs tender love and caring  
A space to freely grow  
Less but more  
of something  
immeasurable  
and only thus of true importance.



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# Divorce British Sharia Style

Julie Billaud  
November, 2013

## Full Case Record

ID	36
Case	Shahnaz v Rizwan
TypeofCase	Divorce - Polygamy or potential polygamy
Summary	The case concerned a polygamous marriage governed by Muslim law. The couple hailed from India. The issue was whether the wife could ask the Court to enforce a term of the marriage contract which stipulated the payment by the husband to the wife of a deferred Mahr in the event of his divorcing her. This clause was enforceable under Muslim law. The Court treated this provision purely as a contractual term. The fact that the contractual term owed its existence to the couple's polygamous marriage was not treated as a bar to enforcement. The Court did not have jurisdiction to make post-divorce financial arrangements at the time of the decision, given the polygamous nature of the marriage. This followed from its jurisprudence on polygamy. It was important not to classify the Mahr as some form of ancillary relief (say, in today's practice, the provision of a lump sum, which seems to be the Mahr's approximate function) although the case itself preceded the development of lump sum awards by English courts. This was because the courts had established that it was contrary to public policy to enforce rights under polygamous unions.
Year	1965
Citation	[1965] 1 QB 390
Court	Queen's Bench Division
RelatedCases	
Judge	Winn

*You have before your eyes the summary of the leading case in relation to 'Mahr' claims in England. In Islamic law, 'Mahr' is something of value paid to the bride either on the day of marriage ('Nikah') or deferred to a trigger event (divorce or death of the husband). Since an Islamic marriage is a contract and not a sacrament, there is a room in English contract law to enforce the payment by the husband to the wife of a deferred 'Mahr'. The case of Shahnaz v Rizwan (1965) created a precedent for the recognition of 'Mahr' in British law. It testifies of the new legal assemblages born out of the encounter between Islam and the British legal system. My on-going work on the Islamic legal culture of the UK aims to trace the various ways in which Islam appears (or not) in the British legal field. The 'court case' seems to be a major authoritative instrument in this process of visibilisation. Ironically, such documents remain quite obscure and difficult to decipher for anyone non-acquainted with the language of the law.*



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# AAA 2013: The Final Countdown!

Allegra

November, 2013



Only 14 days left before the AAA meeting in Chicago! As the largest conference within our discipline, the AAA triggers both enthusiasm at the perspective of meeting anthropologists from all over the world and, perhaps, for having the opportunity to showcase one's work, but also a feeling of unease toward colleagues who were not lucky enough to have an institution pay for this outrageously expensive event. It is quite ironic that anthropologists, many of whom are at the forefront of the battle against the [privatization of the academia](#), end up organising their annual meeting in one of the most expensive cities of the world: Chicago (and with an extravagant hotel to match)!





For many ‘academic nomads’ like us, the AAA is a thrill, but it can be also highly depressing affair, involving thousands of participants and hundreds of desperate job seekers nervously waiting to be interviewed in hotel rooms. This testimony of [Sarah Kendzior in Al-Jazeera](#) is a powerful reminder of the exclusionary dynamics of academic conferences whereby those who are on the precarious side of the ‘knowledge industry’ (adjuncts, PhD students etc.) and cannot afford the luxury AAA meetings have become, have to invest an incredible amount of money in the hope of finding a way out.



The investment we make as young academics to be ‘out there’ is another proof of our neoliberal predicament. As Rosalind Gill’s argues[\[1\]](#):

*“Being hard-working, self-motivating, and enterprising subjects is what constitutes academics as so perfectly emblematic of this neoliberal moment, but is also part of a psychic landscape in which not being successful (or lucky!) is misrecognized - or to put it more neutrally, made knowable - in terms of individual (moral) failure”*

We write this not just as a way of lamenting over the precarious conditions under which (young) academics have to work, but rather because our enthusiasm for the AAA also comes with a few ‘hidden injuries’, to use the words of Rosalind Gill again, that some of you, [dear readers](#), may not be aware of.

But enthusiasm, there is nevertheless!



As we pack our suitcases full of anxieties and excitement, we start to make plans in order to make the most out of the five days that we will spend in the Hilton Hotel, hanging out with some of our favourite thinkers. And because everything is so well organised, we discovered that there is even an [AAA application](#) that can be downloaded on one's tablet or iphone. The application is broken in 6 sections: agenda, exhibitors, attendees, information, announcements, My meetings. You can already get in touch with scholars you want to talk to, organise meetings, schedule the panels you want to attend! There are a range of new tools available now to help plan everything, including the [AAA's personal meeting scheduler](#) and of course [Google Calendar](#). Kerim has written a useful blog post on Savage Minds combining these two process into one [#AAA2013 Google Calendar](#).

For legal anthros, some panels sponsored by the [Association for Political and Legal Anthropology](#) stand out as very promising. Here is a list, based on our own interests...but of course, there is much more to discover out there!

**Wednesday, November 20, 2013**

### **LIBERAL PUBLICS, ILLIBERAL POLITICS**

PDR 3 (Chicago Hilton)

12:00 PM-1:45 PM

Organizers: Nusrat S Chowdhury (Amherst College and Amherst College)

Chairs: Pinky Hota (Smith College)

Discussants: Andrea Karin Muehlebach (University of Toronto)

This panel seeks to engage with the tensions around “the flesh” that inform ethnographic concerns around the political. In doing so, it seeks answers to the





following: How do we account for the visceral substance of the imaginations that both constrain and augment the lives of modern political subjects? Why is it that an increasing prominence of a discourse of rights is coupled with a heightened investment in bypassing law and due process? How do neo-liberal institutions and frameworks condition the possibility of both liberal publicity and its other, illiberal politics? What kinds of affect management are involved in both? How do we bypass a theme of “arrested modernity,” and consider popular politics as enabling of serious intellectual engagement? And crucially, how do these tensions expose the many anxieties that riddle the project of liberalism? Tracking what Eric Santner has called, “the vicissitudes of the flesh,” the papers in this panel explore the many paradoxes that liberal publicity and illiberal politics raise for an anthropological understanding of popular sovereignty. By “illiberal politics” we refer to the seeming preeminence of embodiment and corporeality in mass politics. Modern notions of subjectivity, citizenship, and justice are constantly brushing up against the aesthetics and demands of mass politics that are at the same time harbingers of hope for emerging political collectivities. The nature of such politics stokes liberal unease with violence, irrationality and immediacy. By looking at its form and content ethnographically, the individual papers on the panel are commentaries on the biopolitical pressures of and on popular sovereignty. They further enquire whether the liberal framework has run its course in ensuring a sense of justice and hope for many people around the world. If so, how does culture lay bare these inadequacies of liberalism in shaping contemporary political consciousness? Together, the ethnographic and historical ruminations around tribal politics and injurious speech in India, the confrontational politics of the Red Army in Japan, corruption and popular uprising in Jordan, indigeneity and liberal citizenship in Brazil, and the management of women’s bodies in the human rights discourses in Turkey will speak to both the intransigence and insufficiency of a liberal paradigm in a global political culture that frequently verges on the illiberal. Our aim is not simply to point out certain aporias within liberalism, but to engage with the politics that is borne of the tensions between its universalist claims and the situated demands and desires of everyday life.



## **TECHNOPOLITICAL FUTURES: TRANSFORMATIONS IN STATES AND EXPERTISE**

12:00 PM-3:45 PM

Grand Tradition (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Mark A Gardiner (Stanford University) and Adam E Leeds (University of Pennsylvania)

Chairs: Taylor C Nelms (University of California, Irvine)

Discussants: Kregg Hetherington (Concordia University) and Bill Maurer (UC Irvine)

This session highlights new ways in which state experts and expertise are investigated ethnographically when the definitions and loci of stateness and expertise are themselves in question. “Technocrat” remains for the most part a term of abuse: technocrats have largely been ideological foils to anthropologists’ preferred focus on those subject to and subjectified by technocratic projects. But the ways that rule is patterned by the production and management of knowledge remain of central interest to anthropologists and recent works have increasingly turned to those involved in the production of knowledge as well as the (re)production of power, state institutions, and the state effect. Some of these works have followed a Foucauldian line, examining the co-constitution of objects of knowledge and rationalities of rule (Mitchell, Ferguson, Petryna, Rabinow). Others more influenced by science studies have addressed states and expertise in the co-assembly of the techno-scientific and the social (Latour, Hull, Riles). Such studies have been stimulated by shifts in how knowledge is produced and how states function. What happens to technocrats and technocracy when states see from many vantage points at once—when state authority is diffused across governments, academia, NGOs, and corporations (Trouillot 2001)? Or when



systems of knowledge corresponding to differing disciplinary, national, and political histories are brought together? What do the social, technical, and ethical worlds of experts in these circumstances look like? How are “ethical plateaux” (Fischer 2001) constituted at the intersection of novel technoscience, heterogenous institutions, and moral imaginaries? The papers brought together in this panel address these questions from a variety of empirical and theoretical standpoints, investigating states and expertise in the context of environmental governance, legal systems, energy, fiscal and population management, and other areas. They explore the varied ways in which states and expertise take shape in- and outside of government, corporations, and transnational institutions. They provide substantive accounts of the discursive and material means by which experts work to make populations, nature, and states themselves intelligible, legible, enumerable, and governable and of how expert practices engage political, historical, or natural circumstance. In doing so they open up the black boxes not only of technopolitical practice but also of technocratic forms of life: they deal with governmental regimes, agencements and techniques and how these articulate with the life histories, imagined futures, and ethical attitudes of technocrats themselves.

**Friday, November 22, 2013**

**CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PEACEBUILDING AFTER VIOLENT CONFLICT**

10:15 AM-12:00 PM

Conference Room 4B (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Susan F Hirsch (George Mason University) and Leslie K Dwyer (George Mason University)

Chairs: Leslie K Dwyer (George Mason University) and Susan F Hirsch (George



Mason University)

Discussants: James G Ellison (Dickinson College)

In the 20-plus years since Starn accused anthropologists of “missing the revolution” by framing violent conflicts as extraordinary events outside of their disciplinary purview, anthropology has hosted increasingly animated conversations on violence, terror, traumatic memory, social suffering and war. At the same time, anthropologists have intensified their efforts to critically address the discursive and logistical supports of violent conflict, from the rhetoric authorizing torture to the participation of anthropologists in the U.S. military’s Human Terrain System. Yet despite this amplified attention to violence and its legitimations and effects, “peace” – as either an analytic construct or as a keyword authorizing a range of interventions, from grassroots trauma healing to drone strikes to criminal prosecutions, has received strikingly scant attention. In this panel, we address “peacebuilding” as an increasingly common response after violent conflict. Peacebuilding activities undertaken by local, national, and international organizations and institutions include (among others) those that focus on acknowledging the conflict itself through, for instance, constructing memorials or initiating dialogues among former enemies and also those that focus on fostering a “culture of peace” as an effort to guard against future conflict. This panel explores an emergent, diverse set of critical perspectives on peace and peacebuilding in post-conflict settings. Probing the conceptual clarity of peace as it has been operationalized in response to conflict these critics ask: What notions of humanity, justice, and non-violence are embedded in the notions of peace at the center of specific peacebuilding initiatives? What practices are routinely assumed to accomplish the goals of fostering peace? How do assumptions about peace and peacebuilding preclude other types of response, especially those that go beyond liberal peacebuilding models? How do globally-circulating models of liberal peacebuilding and transitional justice circulate in dynamic tension with local visions and practices? Critical perspectives on peace and peacebuilding emerge from local reactions to national or international interventions and in other instances from the tensions generated as peacebuilders in diverse institutions



(e.g., development initiatives, conflict resolution and human rights organizations, and police and military forces) interact in sometimes contradictory efforts to promote the elusive and ill-defined goal of peace. Panelists will address issues of peace and peace-building from a diverse range of perspectives and in a wide range of contexts. Bolten examines how Sierra Leoneans promote peaceful elections through election laws condemned as draconian by international observers, but locally embraced because they grant people freedom from coercion and intimidation. Burrell takes the under-theorized concept of waiting as a starting point for critical consideration of peace and peace initiatives in post-war Guatemala. Dwyer's paper addresses the tensions that have emerged in Aceh, Indonesia as liberal peace-building models constrain conflict memories and post-conflict justice claims. Hirsch turns to the recent Kenyan elections to explore the complex and contradictory interconnections of "peace" and "justice" in peacebuilding efforts. Lauren Leve's paper draws on the affective experiences of Nepali Christian women to explore the disjunctures between peacebuilding as imagined by different parties to the process, as well as the unexpected forms that peace may take.

**And a bit of self-promotion won't harm anyone!**

## **WHERE ARE VALUES? EXPLORING THE 'GENUINE' WITHIN THE LAW**

Friday, November 22, 2013: 1:45 PM-3:30 PM

Joliet Room (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Julie Billaud (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology) and Miia Halme-Tuomisaari (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology)

Chairs: Sally Engle Merry (New York University)



Recent anthropological work on the 'law' has often focused on the formal settings where norms, rules and values are produced and mobilised. Most of this literature has strived to describe the ways in which actors maneuver the plurality of normative orders available in their immediate environment, insisting on "strategies", "tactics" and "calculations" as means to articulate Self-ethical positioning. Whereas this scholarship has diversified structuralist understandings of the law 'as a major instrument of domination', it has simultaneously depicted engaged actors as cynical strategists driven by rational costs/benefits evaluations. This workshop aims to enrich this scholarship by focusing on values. In tapping into both ongoing philosophical discussions on values as well as the emerging anthropology of morality, it traces how values are historically and sociologically conceptualized and what they mean for different actors, how they appear in the world, how they circulate, become visible (or on the contrary, get marginalized) and how they transform social and political discourses, practices and subjectivities. Thus this workshop forms a new entry into recent legal anthropological work on transnational bureaucracies and the influential scholarship on audit cultures by focusing on the 'genuine' (and not so genuine) ways in which actors create and shape their moral universe by actively engaging with values. Further, it seeks to understand how the subjectivities of the engaged actors are shaped and influenced by the various normative forces that inform their systems and modes of action in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. In this workshop we wish to examine these questions through ethnographic accounts of the international human rights regime - understood broadly to incorporate also 'humanitarianism', discussions on 'Corporate Social Responsibility', and legal interventions in post-war/reconstruction or 'democratization' processes.

## **ASPIRATIONAL STATES**

Friday, November 22, 2013: 4:00 PM-5:45 PM





Conference Room 4H (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria (Brandeis University) and Neha Vora (Lafayette College and Lafayette College)

Chairs: Neha Vora (Lafayette College and Lafayette College) and Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria (Brandeis University)

Recent developments in the anthropology of the state have focused on how bureaucratic processes, biopolitical technologies, and on-the-ground enactments of the logics of governance produce differently situated political subjects. This approach moves away from viewing the state as a unified actor enacting top-down strategies of rule. While this line of inquiry sheds light on the multiple and contradictory effects of mundane techniques of governance, this panel builds upon this scholarship in order to emphasize the imaginative and affective aspects within acts of governing as well as in political activism aimed at institutional transformation. Participants in this panel see a wide range of projects—from anti-corruption efforts in India, implementation of “knowledge economy” infrastructure in Qatar, and investment-promotion efforts in Senegal, for instance—less as instances of subject formation than as ordinary enactments of political utopias. By framing these projects in this way, we explore questions such as, how do notions of futurity shape governance visions? How do charismatic universalisms operate on-the-ground in the present, and how can we investigate them ethnographically? And ultimately, how do aspirations towards specific state formations—both from within state institutions and from civil society formations—shape subjectivities as simultaneously political and affective?

**Saturday, November 23, 2013**

**SITUATING TECHNOCRATS: THE POLITICS OF STATE-MAKING**

8:00 AM-9:45 AM



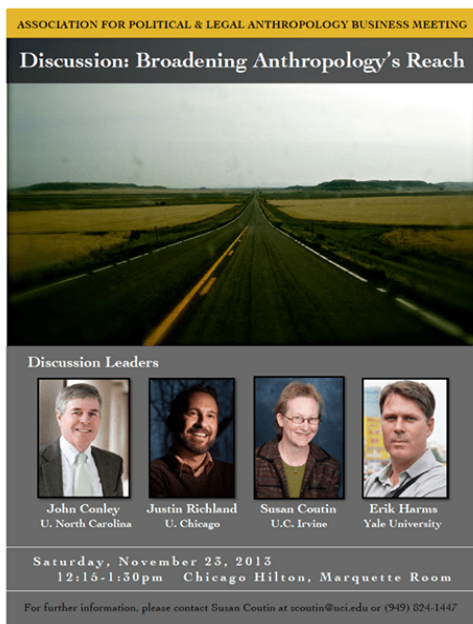
Salon A-3 (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Karen Michele Hoffman (University of Puerto Rico)

Chairs: Maria L Vidart (Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Rice University)

Discussants: Hannah Appel (University of California, Berkeley)

This panel focuses on states, technocrats working in state agencies, and their interlocutors. On the one hand, the panel acknowledges and analyzes how states in part consist of professionals working within reified expertise-based practices, and how their protocols frequently legitimate and privilege particular voices, forms of knowledge and projects, while rendering invisible alternative voices, knowledges, and projects. On the other hand, the works presented here inquire into the multiplicity of activity that also takes place in and constitutes technocratic states. For example, the papers examine how the life experiences and moral economies of technocrats shape their projects. They explore the tensions that run through the practices of technocrats working in states, such as that between a commitment to the public interest (itself variably defined) and the interests of economic and political elites (which themselves may be in conflict), as well as how technocrats manage, resolve, and/or work within these tensions. The works analyze conflicts within the state, and/or between state entities and their interlocutors, as well as the products of this friction. Additionally, the panel discusses technocrats' visions of political relations and the institutions in which they work, their critical insights, and the way that these visions and insights variably open up and close down possibilities for social transformation. Last but not least, the papers discuss the influence on state projects of actors who are located "outside" of the state, which complicates notions of the state as a monolithic category. In these pursuits, the panel describes technocratic state forms in specific historical, social and cultural contexts.



## **DO NOT MISS: APLA BUSINESS MEETING ON BROADENING ANTHROPOLOGY'S REACH**

12:15 PM-1:30 PM

Marquette Room (Chicago Hilton)

With: John Conley (UNC), Justin Richland (UChicago), Susan Coutin (UC-Irvine), and Erik Harms (Yale)

### **BODYING FORTH IN LAW**

Saturday, November 23, 2013: 1:45 PM-3:30 PM

Waldorf Room (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Sameena Mulla (Marquette University and Marquette University) and Sidharthan Maunaguru (University of Edinburgh and National University of Singapore)

Chairs: Kevin G Karpiak (Eastern Michigan University)

Discussants: Veena Das (Johns Hopkins University)

Law courts, disputes and adjudications often produce fractious and dense



utterances through which disputants and their formal agents assert claims using language. Some anthropologists have considered language as “the bodying forth of words,” particularly in relation to expressions of pain and suffering (Das 1997). As pain bodies forth, it initiates a language game that gives words a corporeal weight. Rather than dwelling in a state of inexpressible privacy, or destroying communication, pain “makes a claim asking for acknowledgement, which may be given or denied” (Ibid). This panel considers the implications of the bodying forth of pain in and through the institution of law. Legal institutions frequently enact conventions that treat admissions of pain and suffering as allegations that seek acknowledgement through the processes of adjudication. It is not enough to say one has been harmed. Rather, ostensive forms of demonstration are required to win acknowledgement from judicial authorities. As (potential) adjudicants voice their suffering, it must body forth in the form of affect, corporeal evidence, and, at times, be material “proof.” If such proofs are unfurnished, one can run the risk of being framed as false, incredible, or even branded a liar. These stakes magnify in that disputants may not simply speak for themselves, but for a community, a spiritual group, or a class of sufferers. When participating in such processes, disputants often borrowed from those legal experts who have trained and mastered the conventions and style in which to furnish proofs and perform or demonstrate suffering. The deployment of language at all stages of a dispute is often highly anticipatory in that it imagines what may become necessary for the acknowledgement of pain. The papers gathered here reflect on cases in which legal complaints are attached to intricate modes of voicing, embodying and materializing evidence of harm. Among the issues explored, the panelists here analyze legally binding arbitration as it impacts the reputations and working life of laborers such as artists, writers and actors, exploring the intertwining of voice within creative enterprises and within the law. Panelists also consider how the suffering of and support for religious communities living under conditions of war is called into contention by legal proceedings that cast such support as material aid to terrorism. In other contexts, it is the deeply gendered body that is somaticized and rendered into a legal object that pits body against the voice. The pitting of body against and with voice is especially prevalent within legal



adjudication of sexual violence. Spanning ethnographic settings as varied as South Korea, Guatemala, the U.S. and England, the panelists locate how actors participate in practices of voicing their complaints such that words are made dense and heavy with meaning and credible testimony demonstrates the veracity of suffering.

**Sunday, November 24, 2013**

**CONTESTED POLITICS, DISPUTED CATEGORIES: INSTITUTIONS, EXPERTS, AND EMOTIONS in (POST-)IMPERIAL SETTINGS**

12:15 PM-2:00 PM

Boulevard B (Chicago Hilton)

Organizers: Hakem Al-Rustom (American University in Cairo)

Chairs: Girish Daswani (University of Toronto)

Discussants: Keith S Brown (Brown University) and Pamela L Ballinger (University of Michigan)

Anthropologists of the state have focused their attention on the categorization of populations and national spaces as way of conceptualizing the projects of inclusion/exclusion, assimilation and managing difference, and territorial sovereignty. Building on this work, this panel offers an ontological reformulation of categorization as a process managed by state and non-state actors, rather than an outcome of governance. It does so by shedding the light on negotiations and contestations of population categories that happen in a complex network of relations and institutions at different scales: local, national, and international. Among the questions we seek to address are: • What types of expert knowledge are produced in these networks? • How are these networks perceived and experienced by ordinary people as well as by state and non-state institutions? •



What kind of political subjectivities and emotions do these networks produce? This panel explores these questions through a comparative analysis of categorization as a process in imperial and post-imperial settings where the boundaries of the state and the nation are subject to continuous contestation. The contributors examine the role of experts, diplomats, state and non-state actors, and ordinary people in negotiating identities and belongings through different languages and media. Goff's paper on the Soviet Union explores the erasure of one of the Muslim minority populations through the concerted efforts of disclosure and concealment of knowledge about them. Al-Rustom's paper on Ottoman Armenians looks into the strategic ways in which imperial and Turkish diplomats adopted a language of emotions in negotiating the predicament of Christian Armenians in the Republic of Turkey. Adar's paper on Egypt explores changing perceptions and experiences of co-existence in Alexandria from 1922 till 1967, during the consolidation of a national identity marked as "Eastern," "Arab," and "Muslim." Shapiro's paper on Quebec analyzes the process by which the Canadian province has sought to define itself as a distinct political entity through its parliament via different strategies of affirmation. Finally, Smolenski paper on post-communist Poland explores how the Catholic Church negotiated Poland's entry into the European Union through a Christian hereditary ownership narrative. The panel is thus divided into two broad themes, the first being the politics and practices of erasure (Goff, Al-Rustom, Adar) and the second being the role of institutions in the disputes over categories and belonging (Shapiro, Smolenski). The questions of recognition, identity, independence and sovereignty at the heart of this panel represent both a challenge for scholars in several disciplines and a larger educated lay public. In discussing these issues in a variety of case studies from several continents, the anthropologists and historians assembled here show how the past is invoked in multiple ways both to legitimize old and new claims and to challenge nationalist and imperial historiographies. In keeping with the AAA theme, these papers offer critical interdisciplinary insights into the ways in which the past and future are intertwined in the present. This interconnectedness derives from the fact that negotiations over categories are also negotiations over perceptions which structure the relationality of social life.





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[1] Gill, R (2009) Breaking the silence: The hidden injuries of neo-liberal academia in Flood,R. & Gill,R. (Eds.) Secrecy and Silence in the Research Process: Feminist Reflections. London: Routledge

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# **Gavin Weston on Superheroes, Lynching and Vigilantism**

Allegra  
November, 2013



**ALLEGRA:** Gavin, Allegra is delighted to have you onboard as a contributor. Not only because you are a legal anthropologist (can we call you this way?) like us (and we are a rare species!) but also because you seem to be quite unorthodox in your approach of the discipline. Your first research project was about 'lynching' in Guatemala. What led you to study such a phenomenon?

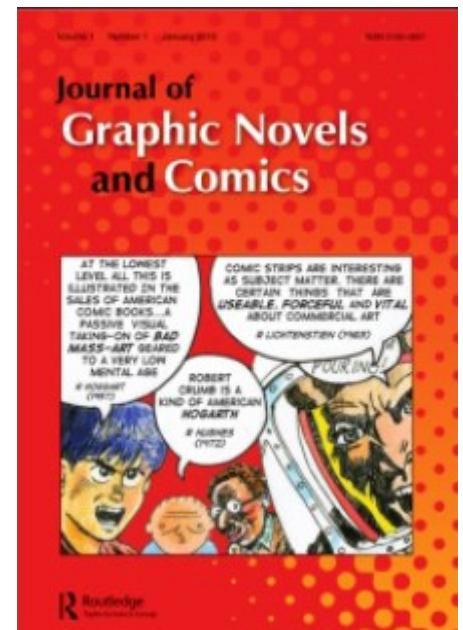


**GAVIN:** I chose to study Guatemalan lynchings as, at the time, they were being described as a new form of human rights abuse by the UN due to the lack of prosecutions. Due to it fitting with my regional interests, my interest in human rights and violence it was a new phenomenon emerging in the aftermath of the civil war that fitted perfectly with those things I wanted to study. In the end human rights became a more marginal concern in my research as rights organisations generally chose to turn a blind eye to lynchings as they were locally popular and were a pragmatic necessity for local populations who were receiving little or no police intervention against a backdrop of a massive increase in crime.

I guess I am on the fringes of legal anthropology. Vigilante acts, being about non-state actors carrying out justice-like practices, occupy an awkward space between crime and justice -occupying grey legal spaces and bumping into ideas of customary law.

My eclectic approach to anthropology does perhaps make me a little unusual. I think of myself as a two-tone anthropologist. The reason I look at violence is because it is the thing in the world I dislike the most. But my sanity demands that I look at other things - so that's where the slightly scatter-gun approach to looking at other things comes about. If I find it interesting to look and see something intellectually interesting I don't feel obliged to spend 100% of my time looking at vigilantism.

**ALLEGRA:** You are now a lecturer at Goldsmith and among your new research interests are Superheroes and Comic Book Vigilantes. Can you tell us a bit more about that?



**GAVIN:** It came about accidentally, but now is something I'm looking at more substantially. While trying to get the publications written that would allow me to get a lectureship, insomnia precluded me doing any writing after about 8pm. When the film [Kick Ass](#) came out I realised that the question it asked - 'why don't more people copy comic book superheroes?' actually touched upon a genuine question regarding the mimetic spread of vigilante violence. I also soon realised that as I started to think about these issues it was work I could do after my insomnia curfew without it impacting upon my ability to sleep. This intersectional area of anthropology, where comics meet anthropological theory occupied a different brain space for me. Once the [resulting article](#) came to fruition I sort of forgot about it and got on with other things. Then all of a sudden in light of events involving the intersection between superheroes and real life crime and vigilantism it became the writing I've had most academic and public inquiries and invitations resulting from. A couple of invited papers later and I've been forced to think about these ideas a bit more and now I'm starting to look at how this research fits more generally with the spread of images and archetypes of vigilantism through the media. So that's behind a current research proposal on the social processes that underlie the spread of vigilantism. So what started out as something annexed



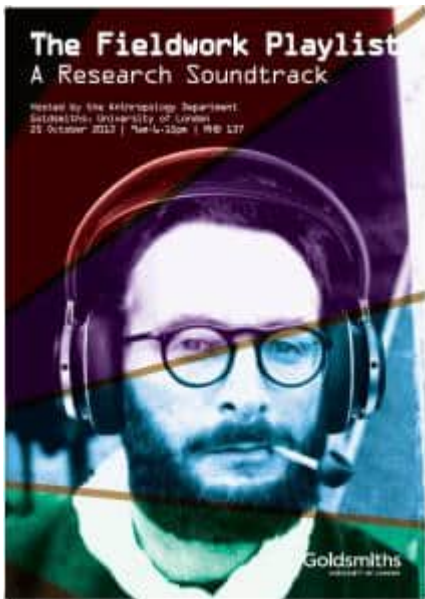
from my main research is now being enfolded back into it.

**ALLEGRA:** You are interested in violence, vigilantism, law and politics. What are the new 'fields' you are currently exploring?

**GAVIN:** Just recently I've become intrigued by the intersection between media and anthropology more generally. So while I'm still writing on vigilantism I'm also looking at fictional anthropologists in films, the role played by music as an evocative medium in fieldwork, the rise of 'comic book culture' among other things. But in regards to the violence and justice related research my interests are moving towards theorising the spread of violence in one strand. And in looking at the increasingly broad spectrum of non-state policing in another strand. The birth of Community Support Officers, the rise of large private security firms such as G4S or smaller ones like [Sparta Street Safe in Darlington](#), the prevalence of bouncers, security guards, Neighbourhood Watch, vigilante groups such as [Letzgo Hunting](#) and the online vigilante-esque acts of groups like [Anonymous](#) - this make for a very interesting spectrum of non-state actors carrying out overlapping or opposing activities.

**ALLEGRA:** Recently you organised at Goldsmith a conference under the title: '[fieldwork playlist](#)'. Why did you choose 'music' as an entry point into research encounters and experiences?





**GAVIN:** The idea had been floating around in the back of my consciousness since I'd read [Nick Hornby's 31 Songs](#) and just thought about how certain songs were evocative of fieldwork and the moments they were evocative of perhaps had something more profound to say about fieldwork as a practice. Once Dominique Santos and I turned it into a call for papers I realised that this was the case for many people - not just in anthropology but across the social sciences. So the Fieldwork Playlist involved each participant taking one song and explaining how it came to hold such significance in their research

experience.

**ALLEGRA:** In which ways can music help us unpack the social life of the field?

**GAVIN:** One thing that cropped up again and again, even from people who didn't submit a paper was that they would use specific pieces of music from their fieldwork experience while writing. That evocative power that music has is key. But the forms this takes is more diverse than I ever expected - we had songs that represented moments of epiphany, others, like mine that touched upon low-points (my song was an evangelical song that was played more or less continuously throughout the night - feeding my insomnia while a mouse I shared my room with tried to sit on my face), others that were resonant for quite specific reasons relating to performance, historical moments, understanding of authenticity or other aspects of fieldwork relations.

**ALLEGRA:** Were you surprised by the material you received from participants?





**GAVIN:** Yes. I was worried that the snappy 15 minute format would lead to cursory snapshots. What surprised me was how much this simple tool of evocation allows you to access and emotionally connect with experiences in a way that cuts straight to the person's experience.

**ALLEGRA:** Which stories will you keep in mind and what is the next step of this project?

**GAVIN:** From the first to the last paper there was interesting things coming up. Everything from virtual reality-based Japanese pop acts through to Mallorcan bagpipe music was heard and discussed. With such diversity it's hard to single out any one thing. With [Kieran Fenby-Hulse](#)'s end summary of the Playlist it did start to feel like the Playlist was a thing in and of itself.

I'm currently working it into a book proposal - so, fingers crossed. The abstracts and Youtube clips of the songs can be found over on our WordPress site for the conference (click [here](#))

**ALLEGRA:** If Allegra was to launch a 'fieldwork jukebox', would you like to be our DJ and teach us how to collect (and mix together) the best fieldwork tunes? What would be your advice?

**GAVIN:** I think the other thing that was recurrent across papers was how people use music as a form of mood-altering medication. But I think the music I use to self-medicate is very different from that others would choose, so I'm not sure



everybody would appreciate my DJing. But if it's a Jukebox aimed at Fieldworkers I would have this medicinal property in mind. I would break it down into sections - music to wallow in (for me [Ryan Adams' Come Pick Me Up](#) or anything by The Smiths), music to get you enthused ([Outkast - Hey Ya](#) did this for me in the field), music to make you feel less angry about X (Johnny Cash or early Manic Street Preachers do this for me), etc... Coming up with the right categories so that people can use it like this would be key to the Jukebox being an effective fieldwork tool.

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## **Spirits at AVMoFA**

Konstantinos Zorbas  
November, 2013



*From the depths of Siberia, amidst the wilderness of Tuva, this ancient stone evokes shamanic senses of awe and inspiration before the vast landscape (filled as it is with various spirit-masters and similar 'entities'). Situated in Russia's frontiers to north-western Mongolia, Tuva Republic (a territory the size of modern Greece), is known for its natural reserves and civilizations dating back*



*to 5,000 BC, as well as for a current proliferation of shamanic and Buddhist religions - which were revived after the fall of Soviet socialism. With Tuva's 'post-Soviet hypertrophy of religious expression' (Zorbas 2007; 2013), cultural relics and artefacts, as the column above, have taken on a new lease of life, as re-imagined repositories of renewable energy to be used by shamans themselves in their arduous healing or anti-cursing rituals. Indeed, although it challenges the legally circumscribed contexts of shamanic practice in Tuva, this shamanic re-interpretation of ancient columns is consistent with their meaning - as the latter is revealed in the zoomorphic petroglyphs which decorate our column: as symbolic constellations of life's endless renewal, these artefacts objectify a pattern of thinking which also informed the rituals of the shamans whom I researched in Tuva - either as healers or as catalysts of curse-inflicted misfortune.*

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# **WORKING IN FASHION - PRECARITY AND PASSION**

Giulia Mensitieri  
November, 2013



As part of my doctoral research on workers in the [fashion industry in Paris and Brussels](#), I conducted fieldwork for a year and a half. I had found an agreement with Franck, a young Belgian designer highly appreciated by the press and the media. In return for allowing me to observe his work, I helped his team of collaborators in the preparation of the show organised in the context of the “Fashion Week” in Paris. I spent 3 weeks in his studio in Brussels, working from 9 am to 6 pm and I supported his team for a week during its stay in Paris.□ But how was the agreement made? I learnt that Frank was looking for some assistants. Here is the announcement that circulated on a job announcements website, followed by my application.

### **A Brussels-based studio producing prêt-à-porter is looking for a trilingual intern able to carry out multiple tasks**

#### **Job Description**

*The position will be given to an intern and includes the following tasks :*

- *Preparing and sending press kits to customers or prospects (via email or mail)*



- *Ensuring the follow-up of payments for outstanding invoices (customers + suppliers)*
- *Preparing the showroom twice a year*
- *Entering new clients and their contact details (delivery addresses , VAT ... ) in the Excel database*
- *Sending orders at the end of the season (fax or email ) and request confirmation of reception*
- *Organizing meetings*
- *Ensuring the follow-up in Excel of sales results by season, customer and supplier*
- *Writing and translation of mail*
- *Administrative Support*
- *General Assistance*
- *Versatility: planning management, reception of incoming calls ...*
- *Accounting: payment of bills, preparation of invoices, preparation of VAT, preparation of accounting documents*
- • *Distribution: dispatch of goods to customers twice a year*

### **Job's requirements**

*We are looking for the following profile :□• Perfectly bilingual French / Dutch and with a very good command of English (ideally trilingual)*

- *Flexible, structured , methodical and engaged*
- *Good computer skills (Mac , Excel, Office ... )*





- *Ideally, a student about to graduate in management or secretarial work.*

## **Working conditions**

*We offer an internship in a diverse and interesting position and in a pleasant environment. We cover food expenditures. □ • Minimum 3 to 6 months*

## **Giulia the anthropologist**

Hello Franck ,

This is Giulia , the Italian anthropologist who interviewed you last year. Do you remember me? □ I'm writing to you because I learnt that you are looking for an assistant who could help you with organizing your work. As you may remember, I'm doing a doctoral research on the fashion industry, and more specifically on the people who work in it.

For the past year I did many interviews, but the most useful for me to understand how this fascinating and complex world works is to be present there, to be there with those who are part of it.

Here is my proposal: □ I cannot cover the assistant position full time, because I have my commitments with the university, and because probably I do not have all the necessary skills to fully assist you the way you need. □ However, having studied for 13 years and speaking 5 languages (English, French , Spanish, Portuguese , Italian) , and having worked as a hostess, saleswoman, actress, teacher, waitress, etc etc, I think I could give you a hand, and I would be happy to do so. □ This does not prevent you from having an assistant, of course. I could be a more punctual support, and I can for example make myself available full-time before, during, and after the fashion week. I have a place where to stay in Paris. □ If my proposal attracts your attention and if you are curious, let's have a coffee and talk about it .



Yours,

Giulia



The informal tone of my email is followed by a very formal response signed by a woman called Pilar, in spite of the fact that the message came from Frank's email address. She offered me to meet her and Franck a few weeks later in Franck's studio. The first time I interviewed Frank, it was also in his studio. There used to be a flowery sofa where a large working table currently stands. Notwithstanding his mediatic success and his appreciation from the fashion audience, Franck's only source of income is unemployment benefit. Lacking financial resources to pay a rent, Frank used to live in his workplace, and sleep on the flowery sofa. Eventhough Franck's situation has not changed, now the sofa is gone, and we discuss of the conditions of our collaboration seated around the big table, Franck, Pilar - who is his sales assistant- and myself, surrounded by focused and silent interns and workers. After a short formal conversation, Pilar tells Asia - one of Franck's interns who was a student in science and communication last year- that , "*given my skills*" I'll be in charge of the communication for the organization of the show (which involves encoding addresses in an excel spreadsheet, as well as writing by hand addresses and applying stamps on a few hundred of invitations). At the time of my observation nine people were working for Franck: four unpaid interns, two illegally paid workers, two self-employed workers, and myself. During my collaboration with Franck, I attended many interviews with interns. Students in fashion, management, communication, journalism, and sometimes graduates, responded to the announcement and came to Franck hoping to obtain an internship. Pilar was in charge of selecting applications and receiving the aspiring trainees with Franck in the same way they did with me. Contrary to the provisions of European regulations, internships with Franck do not include any type of compensation for expenses (except for lunches), and are 1 to 5 months longer than the period



prescribed by schools and universities.

### **What makes this internship so desirable?**

During all the interviews, candidates motivated their application by the “passion” that they fed for fashion, for working in fashion, and for Franck’s work. One day Pilar was absent so Franck received Elizabeth, a young woman with prior experience in graphic design, freshly graduated from a fashion school in Paris, who had come by train from the French capital, portfolio in hand, to try and convince Frank that she was the ideal candidate.

Seeing that Frank was not convinced by her profile, she said:

*- What can I do to get closer to you?*

*- But here you know, you’re not going to do anything special, you’re going to be exploited. Actually it’s a double exploitation, you exploit me to see how it’s done, and I’ll exploit you by making you work.*

*- I really want to be exploited by you, fashion is my passion and I love what you do.*

Elizabeth was not selected for the internship, because Franck was not convinced by her profile and competences. However, her speech is interesting because it condenses the main themes of my research: “immaterial” labour, emotional labour, exploitation and precariousness. In the immaterial labour of the postfordist era the nature and form of work do not only change but so does its meaning: its value is often mainly derived from intangible factors and not only from monetary compensation. The discourse of Asia in Paris, the day of Franck’s



fashion show illustrates this point. I was walking with her to the venue of the show. She was very happy because Franck had just offered her to work for him again after the summer to update his website. She said: *“I love this guy, I’m so happy that he made this offer to me, I’ll do anything for him, I love what he does, and in September I will come even if it is on a voluntary basis because I really want to work for him.”* *“Asia is not an exception: the affective dimension of the work is the hallmark of late capitalism.”* At another point of my participant observation Eva, a collaborator of Franck (one of the two workers illegally paid), told me: *“I love my job, I love what I do, I know I could make a little more money working in a bar, but I’m not interested. I’d rather be here, and do what I love.”*

The separation between work and monetary compensation is very common in immaterial labor. Economist Andrea Fumagalli and independent researcher Cristina Morini explain the process of normalization of unpaid work in the following way:

*Precarization as loss of the guarantee of continuity of income and rights, calls for an artificial enthusiasm and a power of self-conviction strong enough to make the subject accept to sacrifice himself in a regime of voluntary work. (Fumagalli-Morini, 2008).*

**But are these dynamics that different in the academia?** I let you reflect on this exchange of emails I recently had with a professor whom I met at a seminar and who offered me to collaborate in one of her projects:

*Dear Giulia,*

*(...) Are you happy to contribute to our project with two weeks of teaching on research methods for ethnographic research? (...)*



*Dear Margaret,*

*Thank you very much for thinking about me for this interesting project.*

*There is no mention of the financial side of the project, could you please provide me with more details?*

*Dear Giulia,*

*I'm sorry I didn't specifically refer to the financial aspect: this is a standard within our Academic funding schemes. According to it, the researcher coming from an EU country does not have a special salary, but all mobility expenses are covered by the project. So, you would receive payment for your travel and accommodation expenses, and a daily allowance for your expenses. The purpose is to have some exchange of ideas, while also enriching the researcher training programme. Do you agree to be part of our application then?*

*I have already mentioned your name in the application draft materials, and would be really happy to have you on board!*

*Dear Margaret,*

*I'd be glad to take part in this project, but i'm afraid it won't be possible for this time. Apart from the financial aspect, I'll be finishing my PhD and I really need to use the last months of my scholarship for writing. I'm sure you can understand.*

*Dear Giulia,*

*When will you be finishing your PhD? This is not for next year, is it? You still have a couple of years before you, don't you?*



Dear Margaret,

*I don't know exactly when my Phd is going to be finished, it depends on my supervisor as well. Please don't take it personally, but for material and ethical reasons I cannot afford to work without a salary. As you probably remember, I work on the precarisation of the "immaterial workers", and I do believe that work, even when interesting, enriching and pleasurable, has to be financially remunerated. I keep my fingers crossed for your application.*

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NB: All the names appearing in these fieldnotes are pseudonyms.





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# BIBLIOGRAPHY on Human Rights (Law) etc

Allegra

November, 2013



We feel that it has by now become evident what we hope to do with Allegra: to both highlight ongoing debates and create new ones, to experiment with different forms of scholarly representation - and just show the FUN of legal anthropology (and stuff)! Whereas all of our other categories 'rock' already, we admit to being a bit slow with 'Publications'. This is not due to laziness or lack of consideration, rather the opposite. For this is a tricky nut to crack: just how do we navigate the avalanche of new things that keep on appearing all the time, *all the time*?! Trying to cover everything is impossible, and even a sensible overview would require almost full-time preoccupation.

And of course there is also the question: just what do we focus on? Existing



publishing venues or the various experiments that are budding around us [discussed among others by Tim Ingold](#)? Admittedly, a fixed answer is unlikely, and instead we foresee ourselves progressing in the road of experiment - of highlighting the occasional [new publication](#), of introducing [a classic text](#), of discussing fresh takes on reviews - such as the great experiment '[Page 99](#)'. And also, throwing in the occasional bibliography from an ongoing project.

This time we offer you the last alternative. Please find below a bibliography connected to the project introduced via [fieldnotes](#) over the past weeks, focussing on (yet making no claims for comprehensiveness):

## **Human Rights (Law), Human Rights Monitoring, the UN Human Rights Framework & UN Treaty Bodies (published after 2000)**

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# Snapshots of British Islam (2): In search of ‘ethical business’ at the 9th World Islamic Economic Forum

Julie Billaud  
November, 2013



From 29 to 31 October, London hosted the [9th World Islamic Economic Forum](#) (WIEF): an international business event organised by the [WIEF Foundation](#) whose headquarters are located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Since the global megalopolis keeps on attracting [Muslim millionaires from around the world](#), the



WIEF was another opportunity for the government to remind its commitment to make the new market of Islamic Finance flourish in the city.

The event took place at the [ExCel Convention centre](#) in South East London, a few minutes away from the city airport, by the historic royal docks that have made of London one of the most important commercial hubs in the world. The names of the tube stations that ride along the docks: “West Ferry”, “East India”, “Royal Victoria”, are reminders of this ‘glorious’ past, of the time when the East India company served not only to trade goods with the Indian sub-continent, but also worked as a Trojan horse in the British colonial conquest. The [West India docks](#) located a bit further up on the Isles of Dogs were built between 1800 and 1802 under the impulse of Robert Milligan, a rich merchant and ship-owner, who had returned to London after having established a plantation for his families in the West Indies. Outraged at losses due to theft and delay at London’s riverside wharves, Milligan headed a group of powerful businessmen who planned and built the West India Docks, lobbying Parliament to allow the creation of a West India Dock Company.



The docks once represented the heart of the Industrial revolution in the early 19th century, when the first factories were installed by the banks of the river to transform into manufactured goods raw materials just arrived on vessels from the colonies. The wealth of London largely relies on the legacy of the [triangular trade](#) where guns, cloth, iron and beer from Europe were exchanged against gold, ivory, spice, hardwoods...and slaves from Africa who were then deported to work in plantations in the West Indies and North America.

The rapid reconversion of the docks during the Thatcher era is another reminder of the recent transformation of capitalism in the neo-liberal age. No more ships or vessels can be seen on the docks: but instead the skyscrapers of Canary Wharf:



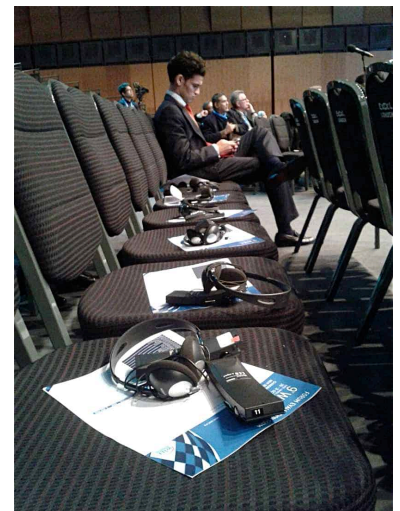


the new financial quarter of the capital.

But today is not a time to unravel the past. Indeed the Forum is held under the theme: “Changing World, New Relationships”. As the secretary general of WIEF Tan Sri Ahmad Fuzi explains in his address: “High unemployment and slow growth demand for economic transformations. In a fast changing world, the human economy and the financial economy need to be envisioned as equally important.”

With 2700 attendees from 128 countries, 16 heads of state, 33 ministers and CEOs from the biggest companies in the world, Islamic finance experts, scholars and health care executives, the WIEF wants to present itself as a platform where a new framework for business can be collectively defined.

Strangely, I find myself in an environment that reminds me of the [UN where I conducted fieldwork some time ago](#), as a research assistant for Jane Cowan’s project on the Universal Periodic Review. Looking at the global elites in smart business suits all around me, with their blue badges around their necks and their conference bags on their shoulders, I could easily imagine them attending a working group session at Palais des Nations in Geneva. The conference offers similar facilities: all plenary sessions have simultaneous interpretation through SIS devices displayed on the seats. Video projections of speakers are displayed on huge screens at the back of the room. The WIEF website has a download centre where key speeches can be retrieved. A media centre with access to internet, fax, printers and photocopiers is made available to journalists covering the event.



The event is not about human rights, though...but it is about “ethical business”...even if at the moment I write these notes I still wonder what Islamic ethics in business may mean in practice. On one of the brochures of the WIEF, I



read that two main objectives of the Forum are “ 1) To **package** the Muslim World as a lucrative trade and investment caucus that is able to attract foreign investors and business partners from various countries worldwide. 2) To **promote dialogue** and foster cooperation among the Muslim and non-Muslim businessmen in the belief that collaboration is the salient feature of the 21st century international relations.” There is, indeed, lots of packaging around, from Coca-Cola free distribution of its famous sodas, to Islamic banks displaying animated graphic charts on High-Tech plasma screens.



It is now the turn of Tony Fernandes, CEO of Air Asia, to take the floor and explain the secrets behind the fast growth and success of his company. “When it comes to business, you should listen to no-one! If you have an idea, you have to go for it and just do it!”, explains the relaxed Malaysian businessman dressed with jeans and a red cap with his company’s logo firmly glued on his head. ‘Just do it!’ Nike’s slogan as a mantra for Islamic business ethics? I am confused...The reason for the rapid expansion of Air Asia, he says, is that “In Air Asia, we have no ego! Many businesses worry too much about their ego. But when we, at Air Asia, make mistakes, we try and learn from them”. The company, he argues, follows a flat management style, which “allows us to do things unconventionally!” And he uses the example of an uneducated luggage boy who was able to become a pilot within seven years of work in the company.

I walk around the stalls, trying to understand what halal business culture is about. I feel a bit self-conscious not to be dressed in a suit, like everyone else. Women, in particular, look dashing with their colourful and creatively tied hijabs and high heels. Another important theme of the Forum is ‘women’s entrepreneurship’: a special businesswomen network has been set up ‘to empower women and optimise their potential through economic and business activities’. The network organises regular workshops on online marketing and Small and Medium Enterprises. Apart from one panel on “Women in the corporate world” organised in the ICC auditorium and the conference moderator [Nisha Pillai](#), I have not seen



that many women on the podium (even though many are present in the room).

The main conversations, however, are around Islamic Finance. In his inaugural address, David Cameron made it clear that he wanted London to 'stand along Dubai and Kuala Lumpur as one of the great capitals of Islamic Finance anywhere in the world'. His government has already taken big steps to open up the City of London to more Islamic finance. Today Britain has more banks compliant with the principle of Islamic finance than any other country. Over 25 British law firms supply services in Islamic finance and the offer of education and qualifications in Islamic Finance has dramatically increased over the past few years. The government has already removed the double tax on Islamic mortgages and extended tax relief on Islamic mortgages to companies as well as individuals, and just last week it made new commitments to open up new forms of student loans and business start-up loans for Islamic students and entrepreneurs. The message is clear indeed: Britain wants its share of the growing Islamic business.



Hamad Buamim, CEO of Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, comes forward on the podium. The 10th WIEF will take place in Dubai next year and, like Cameron, he wants to convince everyone that the city-state is best placed to host the convention and to push forward new business opportunities. « I am convinced, he says, that Islamic enterprise is the solution to the world and that it can satisfy both Muslims and non-Muslim consumers. Dubai is strategically located between Asia and Europe. It is a leading international centre for trade, logistics and tourism. It is a leading hub for Islamic economics. » On this, he receives a storm of applause, the lights in the room are lowered, and an advertisement for Dubai appears on the screen. We are shown wild landrover rides in the desert, Pharaonic hotels and entertainment parks, fine restaurants and conference halls...and the ostentatious luxury of mega shopping malls.



Now comes the turn of the WIEF chairman, Tun Musa Hitam, to deliver his speech. The chairman seems to be on a high (or is it part of the performance?). He shares the view that this is the best Forum he has attended since its creation in 2003. The conversations that the Forum has triggered confirm his intuition that Islamic enterprises can provide concrete solutions to the

World economic crisis. "What makes a difference is our interest in the Umma. It's the common people who really need our attention and the attention of those who are able to provide. We would like to think that we are bottom-up! We need to continue to brainstorm together and think of how the small ones can join the business community! The world is still divided into two: the Islamic world and the rest but we should not allow this to happen. This is the bridge we are trying to build here because the real purpose of business is our common good: development! If we are able to create a strong brand, then we'll make our products marketable...And once a product is marketable, we can spread and grow!" he emphatically declares.

Sitting next to me, a woman called Sima hands me her business card. She is working as a fundraiser for an Islamic NGO and she came here to try and build new partnerships with the business community. She tells me that a large part of her NGO's revenue comes from the private sector especially Islamic wills. I ask her if she was successful. She answers that it has been a bit difficult to identify the right people to talk to. She attended business lunches and seminars, feeling a bit like an 'outsider'...a feeling to which I can totally relate, being totally new to the 'business world'.



On these words coming 'from the bottom', I leave the conference room to find something to grab at the buffet. The 39 artists who are part of the [MOCAfest](#), the World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF) Foundation's arts festival, will give their last performance tonight. Among them, I recognise some British Muslim artists I have seen on



other occasions: Graffiti artist [Mohammed Ali Aerosol Arabic](#), Spoken word artist [Sukina Pilgrim](#), Hip Hop singers Native Sun, [Mohammed Yahya](#) and the band Silk Road. They seem to have become the 'official' Muslim artists of the the UK!

As Mexican American convert and Hip-Hop singer [Marc Gonzales](#) performs a prayer on stage, repeating 'We will heal ! We will grow ! We will win !', Mohammed Ali sprays a graffiti on a canvas, with domes of mosques appearing in backlight across the city skyline. It is followed by a performance of British Malaysian singer Saif Adam, whom, we are told, just signed a contract with a new record label. He wears a black jumper with two white diamonds and a moustache printed on the front.

*Look inside your heart*

*Searching for your soul*

*Mashallah Rasilullah*

*A mother's smile Oh Oh Oh*

*Allah U Akbar*



*And then I'm strong*

*Respect your sisters*

*Mashallah Rasilullah!*

*These fieldnotes are part of an on-going research on the Islamic legal culture of England. This research, which I started in 2009, aims to capture the new cultural assemblages that have emerged in the European public sphere as a result of the increased visibility of Islam. In my earlier note, I have discussed 'pink chadors and black niqabs' ([click here to read](#)).*

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## **VALENTINE LOVE**

Aymon Kreil

November, 2013





*This red toy dog is one of the many plush animals that can be purchased for Valentine's Day in the streets of Cairo. When pressed on the belly, it barks and then says "I love you!" in English. The choice of this language points at the foreign character of the event, called in Egypt the "International Feast of Love", hence adding to it the prestige of universality. From the end of the 1990's on, it*



*became nearly an institution in the country, to the point that many young people think that it has always been celebrated in Egypt. Red Teddy bears are the most common gifts for Valentine's Day. However, the dog is interesting because this animal is often perceived as religiously polluting. On Valentine's day, the red dog opens up a realm of "cuteness" independent from Islamic standards. In a similar way, some pious merchants sell gadgets for Valentine's Day because it is important for their business even if they condemn the principle. Almost all of the products sold for Valentine's Day are produced in China. Through these objects, Western imaginaries of romanticism are available for a cheap price to almost everyone, so that to offer a gift to one's fiancée on February 14 each year is now almost an obligation.*

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# **Genner                      Llanes-Ortiz                      on "ECOCENTRIX"**

Julie Billaud  
November, 2013



[Genner Llanes-Ortiz](#) is a social anthropologist and postdoctoral researcher in the [Indigeneity in the Contemporary World](#) project based at Royal Holloway University of London, and curatorial assistant and cultural advisor of [Ecocentrix - Indigenous Arts, Sustainable Acts](#). In this interview with [Julie Billaud](#) for Allegra, Genner shares his view on the place, meaning and potentials of indigeneity to understand our contemporary world.

**ALLEGRA:** Before we discuss the exhibition itself could you tell us a bit more about the broader project “Indigeneity in the contemporary world: performance, politics, belonging”?

**GENNER:** The Indigeneity in the Contemporary World project is a 5 year research programme led by Prof. Helen Gilbert, financed by the European Research Council and based at Royal Holloway University of London. The project team is a multi-disciplinary and international group of women and men who come from drama studies, film studies, literary studies, theatre production, social anthropology, history, and musicology. We have different ethnic and national backgrounds - I am Yucatec Maya from Mexico, and Dylan Robinson is a Stö:lō scholar from Canada, but there are other nationalities, too: Prof. Helen Gilbert is



Australian, Dani Phillipson is Canadian, Charlotte Gleghorn is British, Sergio Huarcaya is Peruvian, and Arifani Moyo is Zimbabwean.

The project set out to undertake research on different aspects of performance practice among contemporary Indigenous communities around the world. Performance is here understood in a broad sense - although from my perspective as a Latin American, in a manner difficult to translate to the Anglophone conception. By performance we mean embodied art forms and practices that stand for key aesthetic and political values among Indigenous creators and communities. This includes theatre, dance, film, music playing, avant-garde performance, conceptual artistic interventions, but also public rituals, art festivals, beauty pageants, demonstrations, direct action, among many other practices. Hence, the second line in the name of the project: "Politics, Performance, Belonging".

**ALLEGRA:** What kind of questions does this project want to explore?

**GENNER:** There are a number of questions we have been focusing on. Each one of us has their own particular set, and what they all have in common, I guess, that they aim to understand how Indigenous bodies' iterative practice and/or spontaneous interventions in the public sphere contribute to challenge racist stereotypes and political disenfranchisement.

**ALLEGRA:** In which ways does London provide the ideal setting for exploring such questions?

**GENNER:** Many of the artists whose work is being presented at the exhibition or who will be personally take part in the interesting programme of interactive events and live performances live in places that were once part of the so-called British Empire, for example, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Samoa. Thus, the Ecocentrix exhibition provides a space for them to "occupy" (artistically as well as politically), to contest cultural misrepresentations and to call attention to the plight of their nations, which are in no small part due to British imperialist expansion. Merely a few examples include the Aboriginal





Australian 'stolen generations', the loss of territorial and political sovereignty of First Nations in Canada and U.S. Native societies, and the banning of art forms in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Latin American Indigenous artists and intellectuals do not have the same painful relation with the United Kingdom. This is however an important opportunity for people in London to get to know and understand what happens beyond the confines of the English-speaking world in a way that is not exoticised. It offers the British public a chance to see Indigenous cultural expression in their contemporariness and urgency, and to connect with their vibrancy in a way that, we hope, would be mutually beneficial.

**ALLEGRA:** Why, in your opinion, does the concept of indigeneity provide an interesting entry point into the transformations of the contemporary world?

**GENNER:**

*As an Indigenous person and scholar, I believe that Indigenous cultural orientations offer alternative views and ways of co-creating and re-creating the world, ones that are embedded in both ancient cosmologies and radically contemporary (one even might say, post-modern) practices that focus on survival, healing, recycling, and renaissance.*

I do not think that Indigenous communities possess any arcane or exclusive knowledge that could miraculously "save" humanity, but I DO think that our histories and knowledge show meaningful and respectful relations with the land, the plants, the animal world, the forests, the water bodies and the various ways these relations reflect different and equally valuable understandings of humanity. I think that they jointly will assist in envisioning a fairer future.

**ALLEGRA:** ECOCENTRIX uses indigenous performance and art in order to reflect on broader questions related to ecology, memory, identity, globalisation etc. Why did you choose such an angle?



**GENNER:** As a research team we tried to be very careful not to further the exoticisation or anthropologisation of Indigenous communities, as if they exclusively belonged in museums or remote corners of the earth. We wanted to show that Indigenous concerns and practices are radically contemporary, and that have as much significance for people in, for instance, rural Yucatan as they do to people in Nairobi, Bangalore, Buenos Aires, Lyon, or Shanghai.

**ALLEGRA:** The visitor of the exhibition will not leave the OXO tower with a very clear idea of what indigeneity is. In my opinion this is the greatest strength of this exhibition: the fact that the 'indigenous' stories that are told here are not the ones people expect. The exhibition deliberately avoids folklore and 'classic' anthropological categories. Can you explain the rationale behind such a choice?

**GENNER:**

*Our explicit goal was not to "define" indigeneity (however possible this enterprise could ever be) but to offer a window into the beauty, creativity and vitality of Indigenous artistic and political pursuits. We didn't want to stress the traditional but to encourage disruption.*

The links have to be established by the audience. The curator, Prof. Helen Gilbert, was very explicit that little or no anthropological information was to be provided in the displays for we wanted to highlight the aesthetic and not the ethnographic value of the work. You would not want to have captions explaining the historical context where Damien Hirst or Tracey Emin did their work; right? Why would you want to have that to understand Indigenous artists like Edgar Heap of Birds, Fiona Foley or David Hernandez Palmar?

**ALLEGRA:** Would you agree to say that indigeneity is a way of seeing the world?

**GENNER:**

*My personal take on this issue, as a Maya from Yucatan, is that indigeneity is a way of standing and walking on your own feet in close relation to the land that*





*sustains you.*

By this I mean that indigeneity is not merely about “seeing” but fundamentally about inhabiting. For those who think that indigeneity is in danger of leading to new forms of ethnic hatred I say that, for me and for many Indigenous artists involved in this exhibition, the right to indigeneity is the right (and duty) to welcome other people into your own country.

**ALLEGRA:** In his book “Metaphysiques cannibales”, Brazilian anthropologist Viveiros de Castro explains: “What each experience of another culture offers us is an opportunity to experiment with our own culture”. ECOCENTRIX seems to be doing exactly this: to experiment with indigenous ‘cultures’ and to encourage visitors to reflect about their own cultures. Is this correct?

**GENNER:** Yes, that was the intention, and I appreciate you being able to unpack this notion. This idea was in the back of our heads all the time and I hope other people will see it like you do. There will be other people that would probably still see this exhibition as an “exotic” intervention right in the heart of London, but as I said before this work is about Indigenous people as much as it is about African, European, American and Asian societies.

**ALLEGRA:** While walking through the exhibition the visitor discovers forgotten stories of indigenous London. Hence the exhibition starts by placing London as the stage where indigeneity is performed, so that from the outset indigeneity is disconnected from the exotic locations to which it is usually associated. Can you tell us about the cultural assemblages on which you wanted to emphasize in this exhibition?

**GENNER:** We wanted to challenge the idea that Indigenous participation in so-called ‘global conversations’ is something that just began in the 20th century. There have been Indigenous travellers, and diplomats, as well as stolen children and enslaved people since the beginning of ‘contacts’ between the original nations of the Americas and Europeans. The cosmopolitan impulse of Indigenous



actors is what we wanted to show. How they deal with universal problems like dealing with the past, and imagining the future. Indigenous artists and communities share concerns with European movements like environmental degradation, food integrity, domestic violence, political mobilization and reconciliation, among other topics that are explored in this exhibition.

**ALLEGRA:** In which ways can indigenous cosmologies offer novel or relevant answers to the problems of our contemporary world?

**GENNER:**

*This exhibition is a reminder that knowledge does not merely reside in cerebral machinations but that it comes alive in practice, that is, in performance.*

Indigenous forms of understanding, and connecting with, the world have been able to survive genocide attempts because they are embodied. I guess the lesson for me is that, if you want to change the world for the better, you must be able not just to imagine it but to perform it, too.

The Ecocentrix exhibition is curated by [Professor Helen Gilbert](#). This international event runs at Bargehouse, Oxo Tower Wharf, SE1 9PH, from 25 October to 10 November 2013. See the exhibition website at [www.indigeneity.net/ecocentrix](http://www.indigeneity.net/ecocentrix) for more details or join us on [facebook](#) or [twitter](#).

\* \* \*

This is the list of events taking place within the frame of the exhibition, Ecocentrix: Indigenous Arts, Sustainable Acts (<http://www.indigeneity.net/ecocentrix>), between Monday the 4th of November



and Sunday the 10th of November. This is OUR LAST WEEK. Do not miss the opportunity to browse the incredible performances that we have curated for you at Bargehouse!

- Tuesday 5 November, 5.30-6.30pm, MC Tz'utu performs the beats of Guatemalan hip-hop live. (Please, arrive 15 minutes earlier).
- Thursday 7 November, 2.30-4.00pm, filmmaker and artisan Irma Poma Canchumani leads a workshop on gourd carving and traditional stories in the Andes.
- Friday 8 November, 5.30-6.30pm, Pasifikan performance artist Rosanna Raymond performs costume and spoken word art.
- Saturday 9 November, 5.30-6.30pm, Maya activist MC Tz'utu performs the beats of Guatemalan hip-hop live. (Please, arrive 15 minutes earlier).

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Bargehouse is at Oxo Tower Wharf, Bargehouse Street, Bankside, Greater London SE1 9PH.

If you want to contact any of these artists for an interview, please, contact Genner Llanes-Ortiz by e-mail ([G.Llanes-Ortiz@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:G.Llanes-Ortiz@rhul.ac.uk)) or by phone 07765 690489.

All photo credits: [Ecocentrix](#)

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# LONDON CALLING

Allegra  
November, 2013



There is so much going on in the global megalopolis that it is difficult to get one's head around the constant buzz of events and news coming from every direction. And at the same time, after a [storm](#) that has left us all kind of dizzy, a Prime Minister who advises people faced with [rising energy bills to wear jumpers](#)(!), one is left with a strange feeling of the '[end of an era](#)'.

Add to this bleak image the global crisis that hits the shores of the Island with much greater violence than the recent typhoon: the [Red Cross](#) just announced that it is about to launch its [first emergency food aid since World War II](#). As one walks the streets of the City, packed with people in smart suits rushing for their business lunches in fancy restaurants, it is difficult to imagine that this Geneva based charity, which usually intervenes in disaster struck regions, is about to distribute food to Britains' needy.



Here, like in the rest of Europe, the current financial crisis has led the government to track down migrants. The 'banality of evil' seems to be as simple as [a text message](#): apparently over the past weeks the The UK Border Agency has sent what are by now thought to be hundreds of intimidating text messages to British Citizens threatening them with deportation. Who knew border control had just become so easy!

At the same time students continue to occupy their universities while they are trying to keep the momentum in their continued struggle against privatization. I feel inspired by [Occupy Sussex](#) in particular: the creativity and the political maturity of the students of this movement set an example for us all. They may not receive as much publicity as [Russel Brand's revolutionary talks](#), but Allegra stands in solidarity!



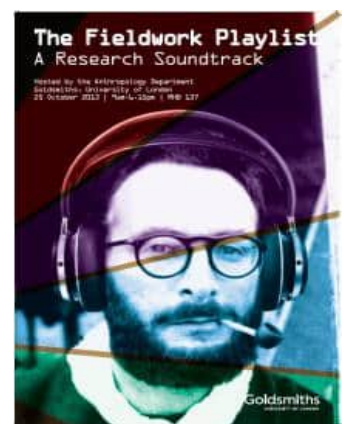
However, London is not only about strikes, crisis and xenophobic politics. For those interested in 'indigeneity', there are a series of talks & performances currently going at the [Bargehouse, Oxo Tower Wharf](#), organised by the research group 'Indigeneity in the Contemporary World: Performance, Politics, Belonging' @ Royal Holloway. Do not miss their exhibition [EcoCentrix: Indigenous Arts, Sustainable Acts](#) - an [exhibition](#) that brings to London the work of more than 40 artists from the Americas, Australia, the Pacific and South Africa from now until November, 9.

On November 2, there is a Q&A at the screening of Releb'al Q'ij (Where The Sun Is Born) - Institute of Contemporary Arts. And until November, 3: Origins: Festival of First Nations at Richmix.



Need more entertainment still? From 24 to 30 November, [Hackney Picture House](#) will host [London Feminist Film Festival](#). Over the seven day event 10 feature length films and 21 short films will be screened from 18 different countries. The festival includes eight UK Premieres, eight European Premieres, and six World Premieres.

The academic life, in spite of - or perhaps thanks to? - budget cuts and all this artistic excitement is equally vibrant. On October 25<sup>th</sup>, Allegra contributor Gavin Weston at the [Anthropology Department of Goldsmiths](#), organized a one day conference under the fancy title of 'Fieldwork playlist'. Check out the [website](#), the abstracts and the fieldwork playlist on youtube!



If you want to get in all the fun, the [London Review of International Law](#) is currently calling for papers, under the theme: '[Sociological Inquiries into International Law](#)'. The aim of this workshop is to help bring contemporary international law scholarship into a closer conversation with a number of inspiring and theoretically rich literatures on law and markets deriving from traditions of thinking within sociology and anthropology. This promises to be an inspirational conference at the [London School of Economics](#) (Deadline: 1 November 2013).

And since you're at it, why not apply to this position at LSE? The Law department is looking for an [Assistant Professor in Law and Anthropology](#). Deadline for applications: 20 November 2013.





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# In search of 'Entertainment' at the UN (3/5)

Miia Halme-Tuomisaari  
November, 2013



*This is a phenomenally impersonal and detached forum for addressing what really are issues of life and death for millions of people.... The meeting itself reinforced this detachment, with its ungodly amount of minutiae and complete absence of any emotion whatsoever. This is unabashedly, and unmistakably, an insider's club.*

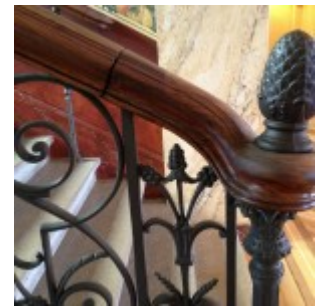
This is how my research assistant described her first experiences of following the sessions of the Human Rights Committee.

I had asked her to monitor a few sessions before setting off to do background research to accompany my participant observation, and I have to say that watching her expression as she sat down trying to figure out what was transpiring



in front of her in the surreal 'UN reality' humored me. Although being at the start of my own fieldwork, I had still grown enough of an 'insider' to have left my own first impressions behind me as I was now, by contrast, examining the sessions with the most intense interest. Thus her impatience of not having a clue of what was going on was the most welcome reminder of how my own perception had changed, and why.

Admittedly, nothing about my assistant's first exposure to the grand organization had favored great enthusiasm. By the time she finally made her way to the audience seats in the Conference room of the Palais Wilson, she was already quite annoyed - it turned out that despite of carefully stating out that she was coming to follow the session of the Human Rights *Committee*, she had at the Gate of Pregny at the Palais des Nations been given a badge to follow the ongoing session of the Human Rights *Council*. She discovered this issue only upon arriving at the Palais Wilson where the security guards refused to let her in, and I had to consequently try and pull the few strings that I knew of to get her in (at the end it worked out).



That it was the COUNCIL in specific for which she was issued a badge forms an ironic twist due to the complex inter-relations of the two bodies that my fieldwork had made me aware of - namely the Human Rights Committee monitoring compliance of state parties with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Human Rights Council, the UN body with the highest international profile that was formed to replace the widely criticized Human Rights Commission a while back. During its short existence the Council and its monitoring mechanism *the Universal Periodic Review* widely called the 'UPR' have gained surprisingly high visibility, posing a highly unsuspected challenge to many aspects of the UN treaty body system.

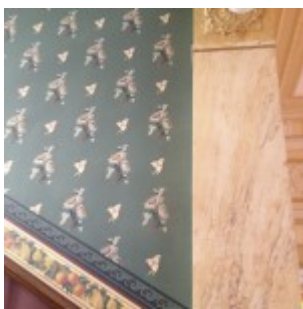
This challenge became embodied in an exchange that occurred at the opening session of the Committee's 107<sup>th</sup> session in March this year. Although quite cursory in nature, I invest high significance on this exchange due to both the slot



of the Committee's program it occurred in, as well as due to the people in between whom it occurred, namely the Committee's chairperson and the UN High Commissioner for Human Right who opened the session. The exchange, taking place around 30 minutes into the session, went as follows:

High Commissioner (to conclude her introductory speech): *"I would like to stay here, but I have to go to the Human Rights Council, which you can imagine is a very entertaining place to be."*

Chairperson (after thanking the Commissioner): *"We'll try to 'furnish' our entertainment quality over the next three weeks here as well."*



What do I read into this exchange? To me it speaks of the enormous role that the UPR has acquired over recent years both in terms of concrete investments of labor, time and resources by state parties, an investment certainly reciprocated by vast attention and coverage, the kind that the Human Rights Committee could only wish for, by the global and national media. There is no doubt that all of these outcomes are the kind that the Committee would wish to achieve, yet very likely never will: the Committee, having been in existence already for several decades, has nothing left of any novelty value, and its continual review cycles offer few surprises - if we ignore the suspense of whether it will actually *receive* the reports that are scheduled for processing or whether state parties fall behind deadlines as has been somewhat of a regrettable norm; or whether they will actually be able to *process* these reports, meaning if the UN Secretariat has found the required time to prepare them which today is increasingly not the case.

Of this particular brand of 'excitement' most recent was offered by the US, scheduled to have its report processed in the ongoing 109th session of the Committee. 'Buzz' about this event had accompanied both of the previous sessions of the Committee this year. In March I remember seeing groups of NGOs gathering in the cafeteria of the Cafe Wilson, oozing the kind of effectiveness that



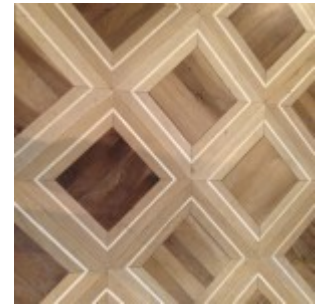
felt intimidating even with no direct contact with the groups. The NGOs had flown into Geneva for the adoption of the 'List of Issues' that was adopted by the Committee in March, and rumour has it that their trip was well worth it: later discussions with US NGOs suggested that they were highly effective in lobbying for the issues to be considered by the Committee.

Due to the widespread interest awakened by the report of the US - not to mention the massive NGO delegation that was supposed to include well over a hundred members - the proceeding of the report had been scheduled for a vast conference room at the Palais des Nations instead of the customary and much smaller conference room of Palais Wilson. Thus everything was set for an important and exciting exchange. Yet this never became: only a week before due date the US suddenly announced that due to the ongoing government shutdown it would cancel also its appearance in front of the Committee, and thus all the expectations for entertainment were transformed into tangible sentiments of disappointment.

In addition the work of the Committee, as well as the other UN treaty bodies, face sever 'backlogs' both in state reports and even more importantly, in individual communications submitted by nationals of state parties, leading the Committee in another instance to discuss whether these backlogs will even compromise its relevance. That the Committee finds itself in an untenable position becomes evident from almost every session where both the Chairman and individual Committee members seize opportunities to highlight the dire need for additional resources both for the Secretariat to be able to prepare more reports for the Committee's examination in each session, and the Committee itself to have two to three additional weeks annually for their session. To the casual observer it also becomes painfully evident that the Committee's attempts to secure these needed additional resources were rejected by the General Assembly in the previous year. This year, following vivid discussions in a public session where the Committee addresses the issue of its working methods, it is jointly decided that this request will be repeated.



However, it is simultaneously recognized that receiving these resources is unlikely due to the constant, and increasing pressures to 'economize' the Committee's operations. In concrete terms this means pressures to rather reduce than increase the Committee's budget; a proposal that was also at the heart of a proposal created and circulated a year or some earlier by the UN High Commissioner to unify all of the existing 9 treaty bodies into one body that would be in session continually. Although it looks uncertain whether this proposal will be realized - the sentiments against it were certainly high among both permanent staff at the Office for the High Commissioner and treaty body members themselves - the general currents in regards to treaty body operations appear thus to be on the side of downsizing rather than expanding.



These pressures are intensified by the undefined nature and concrete impact of treaty bodies. One part of this tension revolves around the complex relation of treaty bodies and law. Another problem is how to measure the impact of treaty body work, and that of the 'constructive dialogue' - their primary public ceremony - more specifically. Many Committee members bring up with disappointment on how states seem to often offer very little evidence of having actually considered the 'Concluding Observations' of treaty bodies. State bodies also on occasion notice how the same recommendations end up circulating from one set of Concluding Observations to the next in the following cycle.

Against these tensions this casual encounter between the Committee Chairperson and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights acquires thus far more somber undertones: it appears as no mere instance of rare jokes being made (the reference to "furnishing of entertainment quality" is an undisputed wry joke by the chairperson), but rather there is something much more important at stake. It is actually disheartening to think that this body of 'international experts' who have travelled the world to be present, abandoned their regular professional activities and private lives for the duration of an entire month, should be set off to the forthcoming intense weeks of the Committee work, only to be greeted by this





message by the High Commissioner that, in fact, to her and thus perhaps to her office, the 'real action' occurs elsewhere - in a place near but so far.



And simultaneously there is undoubtedly also some truth in this exchange: whereas I have not yet witnessed the action of the UPR in person, by all accounts - although undoubtedly also in general a routinized ceremonial proceeding - the UPR offers at least the *chance* of the 'unexpected', the 'emotional' - the 'entertaining'. This conception is, of course, very problematic for the Human Rights Committee in its continued efforts to reach the 'real reality' of real people in the world. And this is also where the reference to fireworks comes in: although a joke, at least *some* presence of something exciting, perhaps even spontaneous and unexpected is a crucial element for how the Committee can continue to engage people both within and beyond the UN, and also thus one of the key ways in which it can argue for its continued relevance. Thus, another way to see the Chairperson's statement is as a *wish* for something of this nature to occur - another ironic twist as his wonderfully polished and generous tenor as the chair bringing reminders from a diplomatic era long-gone in its own right serves also to produce the opposite; that is a continued sense of professional engagement, of courtesy, and a comforting sense of the predictable.

*These fieldnotes are based on my ongoing project examining UN human rights monitoring for which I am currently conducting fieldwork at the 109th session of the UN Human Rights Committee. In my earlier notes I have discussed arriving at the UN ([click here to read](#)) and how 'real reality' is transformed into 'UN reality' ([click here to read](#)). My reflections continue with [NGO strategies and coalition building](#).*



