Academic Fictions: Introduction

Dennis Rodgers
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An often underestimated but critical element of academic endeavour is communication. There is no doubt that many academic books and articles are dense and impenetrable, written in jargon-laden, over-complexified, and esoteric

manners. As a result, academics are frequently accused of living in "ivory towers", effectively only talking amongst themselves. In relation to fields of research that are explicitly connected to public policy, such as international development studies, the communicative imperative is all the more important, since – theoretically, at least – the research that international development scholars carry out should inform and influence policy. Beyond the fact that – *pace* Foucault – knowledge does not necessarily always translate into power, part of the reason for this disconnect can be related to the parochial limitations of the academic style.

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For this reason, as part of a course on "Cities, Conflict, and Development" that I teach (along with Aikokul Arzieva) at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, in Geneva, Switzerland, I set my students an assignment that is aimed at pushing them to think about how to best communicate a message. Inspired in particular by the anthropologist Margery Wolf's famous book, *A Thrice-Told Tale*, where she presents and analyses the differences between a short story, her fieldnotes, and an academic article that she wrote about the same events that took place during her research in Taiwan, I ask students to choose an article from the course syllabus, and to re-write it as a 1,500-word work of fiction, along with a 500-word appendix explaining the logic behind their efforts.

The idea of the exercise is to explore how best to convey a point or experience, and to experiment with a different form of representation. The latter is crucial for several reasons. On the one hand, as the sociologist Lewis Coser pointed out in his volume on *Sociology through Literature*, while "fiction is not a substitute for systematically accumulated, certified knowledge. …The creative imagination of the literary artist often has achieved insights into social processes which have remained unexplored in social science" (1963: 3). On the other hand, as the philosopher Martha Nussbaum put forward in her book on *Poetic Justice*, certain

types of “narrative literature” can help promote a more vivid, “sympathetic imagination”, thereby contributing to “shaping the public sphere” (1997: xviii).

This thematic thread offers a selection from the generally very original and evocative assignments produced by the students on my “Cities, Conflict, and Development” course. The examples that I have chosen to showcase are varied in form, and include poems, short stories, a literary montage, as well as two epistolary fictions. The starting point for each of these is an academic article – or sometimes two – and some element of the latter that struck the contributors to this thread as either particularly important or, alternatively, sub-optimally represented in the original article. In different ways, their contributions seek to put these forward more vividly, more revealingly, more forcefully, or from a different angle, in order to make us think and re-think about them.

> *The examples include poems, short stories, a literary montage, as well as two epistolary fictions.*

Several of the contributors also combine their alternative representations of their selected academic works with elements drawn from their own life experiences, or else have inspired themselves stylistically from specific works of fiction, thereby constituting double intellectual homages not just to the original academic works but also to other, more literary works that have influenced them and their thinking. In all cases, however, the reader is transported, challenged, and made to think about issues, examples, and representation in new ways.

In doing so, the contributions to this thematic thread arguably bring together two different but interconnected meanings of the idea of “representation”. On the one hand, the term refers to the way that things are “presented” – not so much mirroring reality but rather according to particular conscious or unconscious conventions. On the other hand, the term also takes us into political territory, and relates to key ideas about representative democracy. Seen from this double perspective, what the contributions to this thematic thread can therefore be said to highlight is the importance of recognising how and why representations are

created and projected, or silenced and ignored, and what consequences this has for the construction of the public sphere.

Featured Image by Klaudia Piaskowska, unsplash.com

Jobseekers in Dubai in the time of COVID-19 (IV)

Fino
February, 2021

Part Four: “When will this Covid be over?”

During the first month of T.’s search for work in Dubai, Covid-19 felt like something that had happened last spring. We might have quite forgotten about it, were it not for the obligatory masks and the ongoing shortage of airport jobs. Dubai had chosen to stay open, protected by a discipline of masks and social distancing. However, the discipline was comparatively loose. Cafés, restaurants, bars and shops have remained open (except for those that went bankrupt during or after the lockdown, and there are frighteningly many of them). Most people live in shared accommodations where they interact at close proximity. In the dormitory I lived in, and in others I visited, social distancing is impossible. Eight men shared a room – and this was a spacious arrangement; the room was large and might have easily been made to accommodate 15, even 20. Eating shared

meals from shared plates was a daily emotional highlight that we were unwilling to give up. In the Dubai metro, which is the city's fastest and very efficient means of public transportation, only half of the seats are in use to maintain distance among passengers, but passengers stand shoulder to shoulder in full rush hour-trains. This invited some to comment jokingly that you can only get Covid while seated, but not while standing.

> *In the dormitory I lived in, and in others I visited, social distancing is impossible.*

And yet, Dubai's attempt to maintain the impression of itself as an island of normality with the situation well under control was successful, because it was something that most people in the city desired as well. They urgently wanted and needed business as usual. Just before New Year, the infection numbers, which had remained miraculously stable for almost two months, suddenly jumped and kept rising fast. By the second half of January, it became increasingly clear that Dubai's strategy to stay open by means of masks and distancing was resulting in an increasingly uncontrollable outbreak of the pandemic.

One day in late January, T., his former colleague W., and I went to an open interview for a data entry job at a private hospital. Although T. had a new job, he didn't feel secure in it. He was still on a trial period, and the company could still sack him from one day to another. Thus, he decided to keep looking for alternatives until the end of his trial period. Arriving on the bus from Ajman where we had spent the weekend, T. went to his accommodation in the Deira neighbourhood of Dubai to change into his suit for the interview, and returned with dramatic news. One of his roommates had tested positive for Covid (at his work, he was required to test regularly). The infected roommate was alone in his room, and the five other inhabitants of the room didn't know where to spend the night, fearing that they might get quarantined as well.

> *His landlady tried to convince him that he shouldn't worry since "Dubai is full of Covid anyway.*

On the previous evening, we had received a phone call from H., the cousin who had picked up T. at the airport upon his arrival. He had just tested positive. He had a secure job, good income, and a spacious apartment that allowed him to go to a test when he felt sick, and stay in a room by himself for the time of the quarantine – resources which many others in Dubai lack. "Just yesterday, I was wondering what happens if somebody in a shared accommodation gets Covid, and now it happens!" said T. Luckily a friend offered him temporarily accommodation for a few nights, and he managed to get some of his personal belongings from his accommodation, while his landlady tried to convince him that he shouldn't worry since "Dubai is full of Covid anyway."

In the dramatic and anxious mood evoked by this turn of events, we arrived at the private hospital that looked to be of high quality. There, an HR employee outlined to us the job offer: data entry for Covid vaccinations, part-time: 3 x 12 hours a week, 2500 dirhams with visa but without accommodation, with transport from the main hospital to the worksite in a remote suburb. They looked for employees who could start immediately. "Immediately?" we asked. "Yes, tomorrow." The HR employee reminded us that it was a good offer because lots of people were looking for work, and the Covid situation was getting rapidly worse. He also stated that if they proved themselves in the job, it might be a way to get other, better paid jobs in the hospital. T. and W. decided against it – T., because his current job was better, and W. because he was hopeful of finding something more long-term: "I'm a married man, I can't afford adventures." Later, while we were drinking *karak* – a South Asian-style tea with milk and spices, very cheap and popular in the Gulf region – at a tea-stall, T. reminded him that waiting for a better offer is just as adventurous as taking a temporary job.

Just two days later, two of T.'s colleagues at work were quarantined at their homes after they, too, had tested positive. He began to fear a new lockdown, and his main concern became getting his new contract and residence permit as soon as possible to be at least a little bit on the safe side.

Dubai's bet, and a bet it is, has been that it will be able to vaccinate enough of

its population before the pandemic gets out of hand.

Around the same time with these events, international media began addressing the rising number of infections in Dubai. They addressed mainly the luxury side of the pandemic: Western tourists having a good time in the beach resorts, bars, and nightclubs. In this way, they reproduced Dubai's own public image as a fashionable city of luxury and pleasure. Dubai reacted with increased restrictions in tourist and leisure sites: higher distances between tables in restaurants, and a ban on live entertainment in bars and restaurants. Such measures could be taken without causing a second economic standstill that Dubai's volatile economy might not survive. But how to provide distancing in accommodations in a city where shared rooms and apartments are the standard? During the time that I lived in the shared room in Ajman with 7 to 8 other men, only two persons (me among them) took a Covid test, and we took it to enter Abu Dhabi (which due to its oil wealth can afford a more restrictive Covid-19 regime than Dubai). Several inhabitants developed a cold during January, and one also lost his sense of smell and taste for two days; but nobody would get tested, because they were too afraid of the consequences of a positive test that would interrupt their search for work, and even make them lose their income or accommodation. How to motivate migrant workers to test and self-isolate under such conditions?

Dubai's bet, and a bet it is, has been that it will be able to vaccinate enough of its population before the pandemic gets out of hand. The UAE aims to vaccinate more than half of its population by March. To accomplish this, they have opted for the easily available and storable Sinopharm vaccine, while the Phizer-BionTech vaccine is so far only available for healthcare workers and senior persons. The UAE has invested heavily in the Sinopharm vaccine, which was also tested here. Data from Sinopharm tests has not yet been made public, which is why it is not possible to know whether the up to 86% protection it is claimed to have is true. I definitely hope it is, because during the last week of January, the situation was clearly getting out of hand. And yet nobody in my accommodation went to receive a vaccination due to a widespread scepticism towards vaccination. (This is likely

changing, though, as employers are increasingly requiring their workers to take a vaccination.)

Paradoxically, however, Dubai may be partly protected through pockets of herd immunity that seem to have emerged largely unnoticed among workers. Because workers are mostly young and healthy (a medical test is a precondition for work visas, and retired migrants can seldom afford to stay), fewer people die or develop severe symptoms than elsewhere. An entire floor in an apartment block can get sick without the authorities noticing, as long as nobody takes a test or needs to be hospitalised. In the company where T. worked before the lockdown, almost everybody in the company labour camp got sick with Covid-like symptoms in March. In the shared room I lived in, five of the eight inhabitants probably had Covid during the autumn, three of them when everybody in the apartment got sick in October, and two (including myself) before their arrival here.

If Dubai could afford a new lockdown, one would probably be in place now. But it cannot afford it, and neither can the workers and jobseekers I have met here. They agree, and I agree with them, that a new lockdown would likely be even worse than the current situation. It would hit hardest those who already have the most to lose: workers who urgently need to keep their jobs, and jobseekers struggling to find work in the middle of a crisis – work without which their families have no income and their children can't complete their schooling.

> *Uncertainty about the when of lockdowns, openings, and prospective economic recovery is perhaps the greatest cause of stress among the jobseekers I met.*

My roommates were interested to know what I would write about my encounter with them, and on one of my last evenings in Ajman, four of them gathered with me in the room, and I presented to them an improvised Arabic translation of a first draft of this essay. They gave me good and useful feedback, and then we decided to take a walk. We strolled around the streets of a recently built neighbourhood, stopping twice to drink *karak* at a tea stand, talking about plans for the future, housing expenses, driver's licences and parking lots, dreams and

emotions, and much more. Our mood was good and relaxed. At the second tea stand, F. suddenly turned to me and said: “Doc, I have a question. When will this Covid be over?” D. overheard his question and commented: “Everybody here asks the same question.”

Uncertainty about the when of lockdowns, openings, and prospective economic recovery is perhaps the greatest cause of stress among the jobseekers I met. To endure a lack of income for a while is one thing; to pay for a plane ticket and to spend money on living and moving around in an expensive city without knowing whether and when it might pay back, means that every step that one takes might turn out to be the wrong one, and yet not taking it is just as risky.

With a salary forthcoming, it becomes easier to be flexible. T.’s new job was paid well enough that it provided him some flexibility. One week after he left his accommodation where the infected roommate was still staying (he had nowhere else to go), T. was offered a partition (just large enough for a bed and one’s bags, partitions are individual spaces divided from a larger room) for 1100 dirhams per month. It cost more than twice the rent of his bed in the shared room, which meant that he would be able to send very little or even no money home that month. However, he accepted it because it provided him safety from the likely risk that more of his roommates might be tested positive and quarantined, which was likely to happen again in either his current or other shared dormitories.

In the beginning of his return to Dubai, T. had tried to find something long-term and certain, and had been stressed to his limits about uncertain choices. Now, he could look forward again in a more hopeful mood. For the first time since his arrival, he told me more about the house he was building, and a terrace for summertime leisure gatherings that he hoped to add on its roof. One day, when I met him after work where he was now feeling more confident as he was quickly learning how the system worked, he told me that every migration costs money at first before it brings profit: it’s been so every time, and with this one, he’s given himself until the end of this year. Only by then does he expect to be saving at the scale that he needs to finish building his house and provide for his daughter’s

education. But this makes his plan of return in two years rather unlikely.

This essay could be concluded with more sophisticated anthropological theoretical reflection about the temporality of neoliberalism, growth and crisis, but now is not the time for it.

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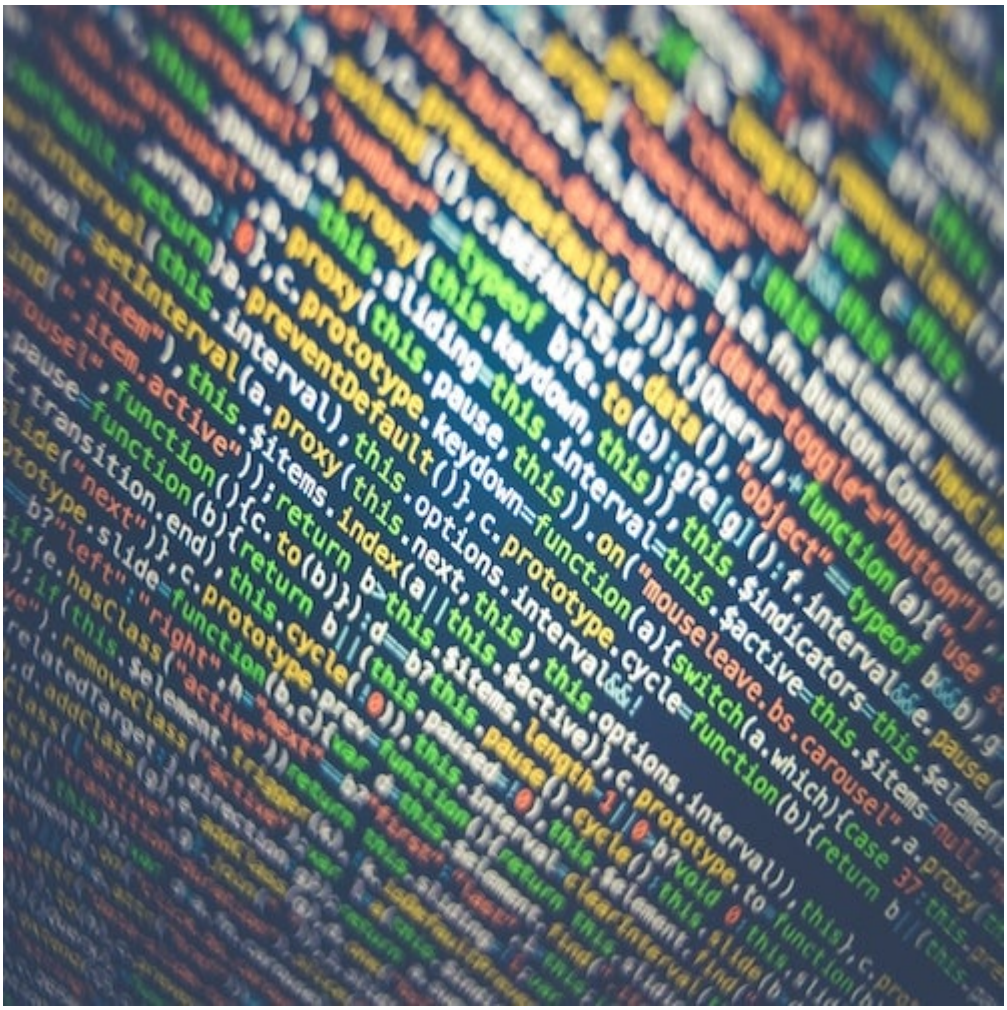
Dialogues on Artificial Intelligence

Teodor Zidaru-Bărbulescu
February, 2021



In December 2020, a group of social scientists gathered virtually at the LSE Department of Anthropology to discuss the relationship between data science and the social sciences. We all agreed on the pressing need to create space for meaningful dialogues between data science and the social sciences at a time when technical systems based on big data and machine-learning algorithms are increasingly touted as sources of 'real-time' and granular truth about individuals, social interactions, and the world writ-large. These dialogues are difficult to set up and sustain, not least on account of issues to do with scale and power: anthropologists and sociologists are few and far between compared to the engineers, statisticians, and computer scientists that throng contemporary governance and industry.

But there is also a problem of framing here. Interdisciplinary engagement on 'AI'

and data-intensive digital technologies means joining discussions where the terms of debate are specific and variably alien versions of the very concepts that are foundational to the humanities and the social sciences – the 'human', the 'social', 'ethics', 'trust'. How can we reclaim some space within these conversations, say, as anthropologists? Key leads emerging from our meetings are listed and detailed below. Overall, what featured in our presentations and discussions is a sense that anthropology has yet to contribute to data and computer science what it should have and still can: fresh means of comparison and critical thought as well as guidance for more creative and judicious technological design.

> ***We need to look within and beyond artificial intelligence systems to reveal the inequalities they generate in order to transform them. 'Artificial Intelligence' systems are intersections of the material and the virtual within which accumulation and inequalities are generated.***

Rather than claiming a monopoly on the 'social' or the 'human', stressing the design of digital technologies as inextricable from a broader world history of colonial projects may offer a more constructive way to find an audience, particularly among the data and computer scientists who are themselves distraught by the ease with which computational systems lend themselves to deepening pre-existing inequalities while enabling dominant groups or parts of the world to exploit others. Scope for building such rapport is readily at hand, most notably in the traffic of ideas between psychology, economics, and mathematics in the 20th century via cybernetics, information theory, and structural linguistics. The time is ripe for exploring this traffic, especially since data scientists and statisticians increasingly approach data visualisation or the collection and curation of data for machine-learning in ways that draw on intersectional feminism rather than the techno-libertarian canon.

A critique of 'Artificial Intelligence' must begin, we reasoned, by calling 'AI' out

for enabling and extending ‘natural’ postcolonialism. This point of departure is inevitable, rather than simply preferrable. Much as this provocation can create scope for an outward-facing anthropology to cultivate interdisciplinary forms of solidarity, evidence of continuities between digital technologies and past forms of colonialism and capitalism is incontrovertible (Couldry). Time and again we see such evidence emerge when the operationalisation of ideas about data and algorithmic analytics, often imagined as the mimesis of one or another human faculty or capacity (Amarianakis and Akasiadis), raises the prospect of enabling capital to discipline and exploit labour in ever-more violent and degrading ways (Anyadike-Danes), to render and monetise human capacities like attention (Seaver), emotion (White), or care (De Togni) as resources for extraction, or to profile and police, and ‘other’ (Jones). Future iterations of such discussions would need to also attend to the material infrastructures and environmental consequences of digital technologies.

> ***We need to move beyond a numeric computational understanding of algorithms to reveal their linguistic formations. By recognising computation as a form of linguistic labour we can strengthen our understanding of algorithms and broaden the influence of anthropological and social scientific engagements with AI***

For a truly constructive critique that offers more than a knee-jerk politics of resistance, we need to take another, more ethnographic look at computation and data science as a field of technical activity. This may mean putting a concern with ‘the social’ aside for a moment, if only to better attend to the centrality of language and linguistic forms in computation. Indeed, computation can itself be considered as a form of linguistic labour. This marked a point of connection between multiple presentations and ensuing discussions. What animates ‘AI’ is quite simply the writing of code or instructions along with the inscription and collation of data points in databases. These written texts differ not just according

to developers' goals, but also depending on their methods of data collection, the programming languages they use, and their ideas about what language is and what it does or refer to or signify.

We learned, for example, that programming languages – like 'natural' languages – give rise to speech communities whose members identify and relate to one another as such (Heurich). In fact, the very mechanisms whereby computers read inputs and produce outputs are themselves designed based on ideas about language and communication as distinctly human capacities (Heurich; Bear and Zidaru-Bărbulescu). Importantly, these language ideologies are often expressions of the ways in which users and designers of AI technologies imagine sociality or relationality. As such, the language ideologies that guide computation provide leads for comparison. For example, at an AI lab based in Oxford, data scientists developing an online content moderation tool employed online workers to label social media interactions as toxic or not, such that the dataset that the algorithm learns from is diverse and incorporates the 'wisdom of the crowd' (Roichman). By contrast, for macroeconomists at the Bank of England, text mining and sentiment analysis techniques are neutral prosthetics that enable them to stabilise and correct wayward trends in the economy, conceived of as a complex field of signals and narratives where agents can come to act in irrational and disorderly ways (Bear and Zidaru-Bărbulescu).

However, focusing on the technics that typify computation and data science does not necessarily mean abandoning 'the social'

The ability to tack back and forth between computation as a creative act and the contexts that define its inner-workings as well as its affordances and implications in everyday life is the chief merit of grounding comparison in the very 'technics' that constitute AI systems and other digital technologies. This has all to do with the intimate connection between technology and society, a key point for Marcel Mauss and Gilbert Simondon alike, for whom the materials and techniques that go

into making technical objects are ultimately co-terminus with wider moral, political, and cosmological orders. Thus, what distinguishes AI systems developed in China as Chinese are the specific continuities between, on the one hand, the techniques and inner-workings of digital infrastructures, and, on the other, a longer history of technological development being pursued through techniques, materials, and philosophies of technology different than those that typified European societies. This history may explain why, in China, privacy is more readily traded for convenience (Steinmüller).

Indeed, the technics employed in designing trustworthy or 'trustless' digital systems are showing that trust is an irreducibly social activity.

A focus on technics and techniques themselves also opens up possibilities for disrupting received assumptions about trust in society, and especially in relation to technology. Cryptographers, for instance, view multi-party computation as a way of obviating the need for placing trust in other human beings or in third-party institutional arbiters. Instead, they claim, trust can be placed in numbers and code and mathematics. Yet, even when data are scrambled and distributed in a decentralised network, new intermediaries and forms of mediation arise, suggesting that the quest for 'trustless trust' is a techno-libertarian fantasy (Bruun). Importantly, critiques of prevailing ways in which trust is modelled in computational systems need not lead to a refusal or withdrawal from technological design. On the contrary, translating these critiques into technical activity can create scope for rebuilding trust on new terms. NeuroSpeculative AfroFeminism, a project developed by the Hyphen-Labs collective, is one such instance. Through immersive installations and VR technologies, NSAF invites visitors to enter a speculative conversation about possible futures from the perspectives of gendered and racialised subjectivities. As such, the project as a whole can be read as materialising the anthropological insistence that trust is a relational process and a performative activity which always involves elements of

intimacy, doubt, contestation, and uncertainty (Jones).

Data and computer scientists can draw on anthropology to inform technological design and address questions of trust.

Our conversations around trust and technology were unlike the standard way of thinking about trust and trustworthiness as a bounded object or a quality that individuals, societies, technical systems, and communities of practice have or do not have. Instead, the understanding that shone through in our discussions was of trust as intrinsic to the relationship between humans and technological objects. There is always some form of delegation at play in that relationship. For example, trusting toasters makes it possible to prepare tea at the same time as toasting bread. In this respect, AI technologies – like other computational systems – mark the advent of new forms of delegation at the interface between humanity and technology. In effect, new problems and possibilities arise. For example, it is unclear if automated caregiving can be designed in a way that respects moral values and fulfills (immaterial) human needs while overcoming the negative relational dynamics that can arise between caregivers and those in need of care. The goal, then, is not mimicking human caregiving, but reflecting on the kinds of care and social relations that are possible and desirable at the interface between humans and machines (De Togni). Anthropologists are uniquely placed to guide such reflection and have already started formulating practical guidelines for engineers (White).

By making itself comprehensible to data and computer scientists, anthropologists can expand the horizons of tech humanism

A key question today is whether digital technologies can be entrusted with the power to influence what people pay attention to and how. Yet the discursive

emphasis on attention also obscures the arbitrariness of defining both the human and the techniques under discussion in terms of attention. In effect, attention is cast as a universal virtue and source of value, when in fact it is only the basis of the liberal-humanist subject 2.0: the attentional subject, defined by the control or lack there-of over one's own emotions and neural biochemistry (Seaver). If attention overdetermines current debates on big data and machine-learning today, it is because computer science selectively takes theories from psychology and neuroscience as models for design. Anthropology could be an alternative source for technical innovation and creativity in data and computer science. What that might herald for anthropology itself is less clear and equally pressing to explore further.

In any case, a comparative anthropology of AI would have to be an exercise in public, outward-facing anthropology. To this end, it is worth noting that many data scientists are themselves critical of slapdash applications of machine-learning. For a case in point one need only look into the interdisciplinary outcry that ensued after *Nature* published a paper which wrongly claimed to have evidenced – through machine-learning techniques – that increases in living standards led to an increase in social trust over the past 500 years. There is, in other words, plenty of scope for interdisciplinary dialogues that could precipitate anthropological interventions in AI research and design. We can pursue these interventions by setting up or joining activist collectives of citizens and scholars, such as Tierra Común. We can cultivate spaces and languages through which to make anthropological critiques intelligible and actionable. And, by approaching computational systems as written and linguistic forms, we can work collaboratively with data scientists in new ways. For example, we can reflect on the merits of re-writing social media algorithms to expose people to a variety of views other than the ones they already hold. These are precisely the kinds of openings that activist and citizen traders are currently foreshadowing through r/wallstreetbets. Anthropologists can and should be part of midwifing these new possibilities.

Workshop presentations:

Amarianakis, Stamatis and Charilaos Akasiadis. ‘Mimesis and alterity in the AI age: Revisiting the Concept of the Mimetic Faculty’.

Anyadike-Danes, Chima. ‘Verify and verify: Trust, AI, and communication in South Yorkshire’s logistics sector’.

Bear, Laura and Teodor Zidaru-Bărbulescu. ‘Artificial Intelligence as linguistic colonialism’.

Bruun, Maja Hojer. ‘Trustless trust in emerging cryptographic technologies’.

Couldry, Nick. ‘Artificial Intelligence seen from the perspective of data colonialism’.

De Togni, Giulia. ‘AI and health: what makes AI “intelligent” and “caring”?’

Heurich, Guilherme Orlandini. ‘What’s in an algorithm? Towards a linguistic anthropological approach to the study of machine learning code’.

Jones, Surya. ‘Making spaces: Innovation in the absence of trust’.

Roichman, Maayan. ‘“The Black Box”: The use of the imagination in the design of AI systems for online content moderation’.

Seaver, Nick. ‘Knowing where to look: Attention as value and virtue in machine learning worlds’.

Steinmüller, Hans. ‘Cosmo-technics and complexity in Chinese AI: anthropological perspectives’.

White, Daniel. ‘The robot’s wink: Anthropological and data science approaches to artificial emotional intelligence’

Workshop discussants:

Louise Amoore (Department of Geography, Durham University)

Daniel Allington (Department of Digital Humanities, King's College London)

Antonia Walford (Department of Anthropology, University College London)

Hannah Knox (Department of Anthropology, University College London)

Ludovic Coupaye (Department of Anthropology, University College London)

Features image by *Markus Spiske* *(courtesy of Pexels)*

Jobseekers in Dubai in the time of COVID-19 (III)

Fino
February, 2021

Part Three: A Travel Agent selling Freedom

For the second half of my stay, I lived in a shared accommodation of mostly Egyptian men in Ajman, which is effectively a suburban extension of Dubai. Ajman is cheaper, less flashy and fancy, quite lively and liveable, and with a much larger proportion of Arab migrants than in Dubai, however without the conservative Islamic regime of public morals that marks Sharjah as the family-oriented and more Arabic counterpoint to hedonistic and South Asian-dominated Dubai. Three of my roommates worked in a specialised car workshop; all others were jobseekers, and there was quite some fluctuation with people coming and going.

One of the workshop's employees is B. He has lived in Ajman since 2013, while his wife and two children are staying in his home village in Egypt. He is the boss of

the room: he holds the contract with the landlady (who lets the three-bedroom apartment room by room to Egyptians, Ethiopians, Sudanese, and West Africans who share the kitchen and bathrooms in sometimes amicable, and often tense relations), and collects rent from the inhabitants of the room. He comes from the same village as T., and his room is a common first stopover for people arriving from the village in search for a job. T. lived in B.'s room for three weeks until he moved to an accommodation near his new job in Dubai. At the same time, others kept arriving, all of them with their nerves depleted and their sleep irregular, similar to T. at the time of his arrival.

First of them in the order of arrival was N. from a city in the Nile Delta, arriving in mid-December, because his income as a private driver in Egypt could not support his family. He was looking for any work. But it was hard to find. He returned from a construction site in Abu Dhabi after three days because the accommodation was so crowded and bad that he couldn't sleep. Another job at a construction site in Ajman only needed him for two days to replace a missing worker, and then didn't require his services any more. After a long search, he got an offer as a helper at another construction site, but he would need to have a visa of his own. He ended up borrowing and paying a significant sum of money to get a residence permit with a fictional contract through a travel agency.

He was not the only one doing business with the travel agent. F. from T.'s village arrived in early January, and has a better starting position. He owned a car showroom in the rural region where he comes from, but became indebted in the wake of a stressful and destructive inheritance conflict, and finally sold a part of his business and his private car to pay off his debts, and travelled to Dubai on a three-month tourist visa. While T. and his former colleagues at the airport as well as N. are looking for salaried labour, F. seeks to make a new beginning with freelance work, first as a driver and then hopefully again as a car salesman. This is a path that requires a longer period of preparation and search, and higher expenses. Many others cannot afford it – among them N., who worked as a driver in Egypt but at least at the moment is unable to afford a UAE driver's licence. F.'s first step was to get a residence permit of his own. In the UAE, residence permits

are linked with work contracts (with few upscale exceptions), but F. needed a residence permit that allows him to work freely. After acquiring one, he can do the theory lessons and driving test for a UAE driver's licence because his Egyptian licence is not recognised here. And this brought him to the same travel agency.

But how did N. and F. end up at this travel agency in the first place? It was thanks to D. from Morocco, the only non-Egyptian inhabitant of our shared room. D. arrived in Dubai over a year ago with the aim to get a good job with a good salary, and to use that as a basis to apply for a tourist visa to Canada and the United States. But Covid-19 intervened, and he has spent nearly a year mostly out of work, but holding a residence visa that identifies him as manager in a company – the same company in fact where he took us for a visit one afternoon in mid-January.

We were welcomed by G., a friendly, playful and compelling Egyptian woman in her thirties, who explained to us the deal. For a down-payment of 4000 dirhams, and a payment of further 5000 dirhams in instalments over 4 months, her company provides a fictional contract (which is provided by a company that sells its unused quota for work permits to the travel agent) and a residence permit for two years. The company acts as the customer's sponsor (kafil), and in her sales pitch, G. explained that they do all the paperwork you need, they will look after you, and whenever you need the sponsor's agreement for something, the company will always agree. The service is called "a free visa", which does not refer to the price, which is more than twice the cost of a regular residence permit.

> *The service is called "a free visa", which does not refer to the price, which is more than twice the cost of a regular residence permit.*

N. could hardly afford the service, but the only serious job offer he received required him to organise his own residence permit. So he had no choice but to agree to a down-payment and monthly instalments that allow him to eat and drink for the next four months, but the rest of his salary will go to pay for the visa. Only

after half a year after his arrival can he expect to send any money to his wife in Egypt. G. told him that the 2000 AED salary he was offered at his prospective job would be very little for a free visa. She advised that he should stay in that job only until he finds a better one, “and that’s the advantage of a free visa,” she reminded us: “The freedom.”

Such visas are widely advertised on social media and in posted signs on street corners, and they are in much demand because they liberate one from the predicaments that often arise when one’s employer is also the kafil and in that capacity can cause various troubles and delays (as happened to the four men at the security company in Abu Dhabi in the previous part of this essay). For some, like F. who wants to make a new beginning as a car dealer, they present a perfect opportunity. For others however, among them N., a free visa is an expensive necessity in the absence of regular paths to a contract with a visa. It adds to an already heavy load on the shoulders of men who see their main role and value in their ability to provide for their households, and build a future for their children.

A., also from T.’s village and friends with him, arrived in early January, originally on transit. His plan was to spend two weeks here to continue to Kuwait – direct travel from Egypt is banned by Kuwait, so travellers arriving from Egypt must first spend 14 days in Dubai. However, he immediately liked Dubai much more, and decided to stay. The decision was aided by the fact that the flight to Kuwait would have been very expensive; also, the situation with jobs in Kuwait did not appear to be any better, and he had to expect an expensive 14-days home quarantine on arrival. Kuwait, unlike Dubai, is not staying open and welcoming visitors in the middle of the pandemic. Instead, it is doing all it can to prevent the spread of the virus. This makes entry to Kuwait difficult and costly. Staying in the Dubai metropolitan area is easy in comparison, with a tourist visa that can be either renewed or transferred into a work visa for a fee. But A. soon experienced a great deal of frustration when he realised that in the few job offers in restaurants (his field of work) he could find, the salaries were low, accommodation was expensive, and the overall cost of living in the Dubai metropolitan region is higher than in Kuwait. “In this country, you can live,” he

commented to me, referring to Dubai's quality as a place where many migrants prefer to establish a family and live long-term if they can afford to, "but you can't save money here." Even so, financial necessity forced him to stay, but he faces huge pressure after refusing two restaurant jobs that in his view were too poorly paid to provide for his pregnant wife and soon school-age son in the village in Egypt.

> *The salaries were low, accommodation was expensive, and the overall cost of living in the Dubai metropolitan region is higher than in Kuwait.*

B. challenged what he saw as A. being picky: "In this country, it's always awful at first." In his view, a new arrival in the working-class level in Dubai has no choice but to take any work available, and then slowly work themselves upward. His colleague S. argued on similar terms, and claimed the ability to endure hard work under tough conditions as a marker of manliness: "Don't be arrogant towards your livelihood. You gotta be a man in the situation you're in." Their work is hard and dirty. B. is the foreman of a welding team, and at the end of the day, his eyes are red from looking into the welding flames – not his own, which he sees through protective glasses, but those around him that he sees whenever he turns his head. They leave the accommodation at 7 in the morning and return between 7 and 9 in the evening, tired and hungry, and they are usually fast asleep by midnight, unlike the jobseekers who tend to stay up late and sleep until noon. But they are lucky not having to face the anxiety of not knowing if and when they may finally find work that will be enough to provide.

> *"In this country, it's always awful at first."*

The jobseekers I met were taking major financial risks to fulfil the most important marker of a man in a patriarchal society: being able to provide livelihood, in Egyptian Arabic akl eish – "the eating of bread" – for their family. It is understood to be an exclusively male role, and even while many Egyptian women actually work and in fact provide for their families, the moral value of male provider role is

held high, and many see it as a religious obligation. Being a jobseeker in Dubai at the time of Covid is an opportunity to prove oneself as a man, to provide, even during a crisis. But it also is a danger of failure that will result in one's family having no income, one's wife having to rely on her own kin, one's children having no money for school fees or private tutoring. It is the danger of a social death as a man, and it looms big over the men I met. They all spoke of emotional anxiety and nervous tension, and they slept badly (unlike those at work who slept early). Not being able to work and provide was taking them to their limits in a way in which hard work seldom can.

> *Being a jobseeker in Dubai at the time of Covid is an opportunity to prove oneself as a man, to provide, even during a crisis.*

In the next and final Part Four, infection numbers are increasing, which adds to the anxiety. Read it here.

All images by author.

Jobseekers in Dubai in the time of COVID-19 (II)

Fino
February, 2021

Part Two: New Opportunities, New Stress

In the Gulf region, Dubai has been a forerunner in the transformation towards a neoliberal market of skills and hands. Gulf countries generally require foreign workers to find a citizen sponsor (*kafil*) who acts as their legal guardian. In the past, this meant that workers would typically be hired by labour agents in their home countries, already arrive with contracts and residence permits, and work for one company until their eventual departure. Seeking jobs from within the country and even changing jobs was difficult. Stories of workers deprived of their passports and salaries, and stuck in inhumane conditions unable to return to their home countries, are common.

In the 2000s, the United Arab Emirates became the first Gulf state to allow jobseekers to arrive on tourist visas, which they could transfer to residence

permits once they found work. Tourist visas have become an increasingly important avenue for migrants on all income levels, despite the up-front expenses for travel, accommodation, and cost of living, which easily exceed the fees collected by labour agents. At the same time, the UAE has eased sponsorship rules (*kafala*). Today, the company that hires somebody can itself act as the sponsor, and a transfer of sponsorship is no longer dependent on the sponsor's goodwill, but has become a routine administrative transaction – for a fee.

> *Countless people were out of work, mostly stuck in their home countries, lacking the means or not willing to take the risk to return.*

This emerging new system of migrant labour has been an improvement for many jobseekers. It is also in the interest of Dubai's trade-oriented economy, which requires a flexible labour market that could not always be fed by the rather slow and heavy system based on migrants recruited abroad on two-years fixed-term contracts. This transformation was also fuelled by the 2008 financial crisis that hit Dubai hard. Although the UAE still is a welfare state towards its citizens, who can expect public sector employment at good conditions, much public sector work, be it at airports or government offices, is today outsourced to private companies hiring both migrants and nationals under more precarious terms.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a sudden boost to the neoliberalisation of the job market ever since the UAE stopped issuing work visas abroad in March 2020 (with few exceptions). The only way to get a residence permit today is by being hired in the country and directly by the prospective employer. In the autumn of 2020, when economic activity began recovering, the unavailability of work visas resulted in a simultaneous lack of jobs and labour. Countless people were out of work, mostly stuck in their home countries, lacking the means or not willing to take the risk to return. At the same time, there were companies desperate to find employees whom they could only hire inside the country. This presents an opportunity for those who have the resources to be there, and especially those who still have a valid residence permit with which to return to Dubai. But it also

comes with new risks and uncertainties.

T. soon had to give up his plan A of getting back to his old job. After a promising start of the tourist season in December, in January already it did not look like operations would further pick up for a while. And so he began applying for all customer service jobs that were on offer, submitting his CV to application systems online and attending interviews wherever he could. Number one on his list was a competing company at the airport. Many of his colleagues had gone there. He was invited to an interview at the company's accommodations, and I went along. He was offered the job, but colleagues there warned him that overtime was largely unpaid due to irregular shift schedules, and that the housing was clean but had unpleasant restrictions – there were no kitchens, workers were not allowed to spend the night outside the accommodation, and if they left it for more than 3 hours in the daytime, they had to show a negative PCR test. Their advice was "keep searching, and only if you find nothing else, then come here."

> *T. found it an unbearable load of unknowns.*

He had in fact already received a better offer, as customer service agent at an outsourcing company, posted in a government office, but he was uncertain about it. It was a new kind of work profile, and the job came with neither accommodation nor transportation. The pay was better, but he could not know how much better because it partly depended on commissions for customer transactions. T. found it an unbearable load of unknowns. He might not have opted for it, had it not been for relatives and friends working in middle class jobs in the Dubai metropolitan area, who told him that it was a much better job than the one at the airport. Even so, he was hesitant. He called a lawyer friend who ensured that the contract he was offered was indeed unlimited, and that he could quit again without contractual fines. He began looking for a bed in a shared accommodation, estimating commuting expenses and walking distances from the metro station – in the summer heat, walking distances are a major issue –, price levels in supermarkets, and filled sheets of paper with calculations. He figured

out that in the first six months, his net savings would be less than at the airport, but afterwards better. Then the company called him and asked if he could start in two days. He bought a suit (required for the job, and an additional expense), and started working.

I had hoped that this might relieve the intense stress he was under, but relief would not yet come. His predecessor at the job, who was supposed to train him, was absent for several days. He feared making mistakes in financial transactions, and was worried about how to interact with Emirati nationals (all of them women) who dominated the workplace. His colleagues were surprised that he had no previous experience at government offices. The outsourcing company hired him either because it could not find experienced workers, or because unexperienced workers were much cheaper. Either way, it was a lucky break for T. who otherwise might not have gotten the job.

> *T. has good reasons to remain nostalgic for the good old days of contract visas, orderly conditions, and predictable monthly salaries.*

T. had acknowledged to me and others that he felt uncertain because he had never been a jobseeker before. In Egypt he was a low-paid civil servant. His previous migrations to the Gulf had been organised by labour agents in Egypt; he had arrived with a contract and a visa, and returned to Egypt at the end of his contract. He listed to me what contributed to the overwhelming pressure he felt: there was the historically new situation of Covid; he had to become a jobseeker for the first time in his life; he took a job in a sector where he hadn't worked before; and he was moving for the first time to an accommodation that was neither a company camp nor run by a friend from the village.

T. is a quick learner, and it looks like he will soon excel and be successful at his new work. And yet if he had the choice, he would not have left his job at the airport, nor would he have left the less demanding but better paid job that he had held in Abu Dhabi from 2011 to 2013. The latter offered the best pay he has ever earned: 3570 dirhams with accommodation and one daily meal provided, as

compared to his airport job that paid 2500 plus up to 500 for overtime per month, with accommodation provided (one euro equals ca. 4.4 AED). New contracts by the competing company at the airport offer a salary of only 2200 AED (following a widespread reduction of salaries by 20-25% in the UAE due to the pandemic in 2020), and overtime is unpaid for the time being. T.'s new job comes with a commission for customer transactions on top of a 2500 dirhams salary (to be increased to 3000 after six months), but he must pay for his own accommodation and transportation. The job will likely provide him his highest earnings so far, but even so he may be able to save less than he could in Abu Dhabi ten years ago due to higher cost of living. And thus T. has good reasons to remain nostalgic for the good old days of contract visas, orderly conditions, and predictable monthly salaries.

The good old days were not that good, however, when it came to the possibility of changing jobs. At his first job abroad in another Gulf country from 2008 to 2010, it was impossible to change jobs. The options were to either complete one's contract or go home, and the company held his passport. In the UAE in the 2010s, the situation was already better, and changing jobs was relatively easy. However, even today, companies can exert significant pressure on their workers to prevent them from leaving.

Some of T.'s colleagues learned to know it the hard way. When airport jobs were unavailable last summer, they found work at yet another security contractor in Abu Dhabi. Abu Dhabi salaries are higher: for security guards, 2700 dirhams with accommodation included, instead of 2200 in Dubai. However, they discovered that they were being officially hired in Dubai, and thus received a lower salary. The work was tiring and boring (typically standing outdoors at various sites), and they found the bathrooms at the accommodation of unbearably low standard. New job openings emerged at Dubai Airport, and they hoped to be hired there or somewhere else in Dubai. At their previous employer at the airport, which they now remembered with nostalgia, they had had unlimited contracts that they could leave with a one-month notice period. Now, they were stuck in two-year fixed-term contracts and had to pay a contractual fine equivalent to 45 days' base

salary to quit early. They did, but the company refused to accept their resignation.

In late December, I met four of T.'s former colleagues in Abu Dhabi in very good spirits. They had filed a lawsuit demanding an immediate cancellation of the contracts because hiring them in Dubai and posting them in Abu Dhabi was illegal. While we were eating lunch, they received text messages confirming that they had won their case. They were in jubilant mood, already planning where they would want to live in Dubai and speaking of the "girls" they would invite to their future accommodations.

The workers I have met generally appreciated the rule of law that prevails in the UAE. Courts routinely rule in favour of workers in labour cases, and some judges even side with workers who have signed documents waiving claims towards their employers because judges know that workers are often forced to sign, and consider such signatures not binding. That said, the laws organising migrant labour still provide employers ample means to discipline workers. The foremost means of discipline is the threat of a ban from the UAE, which can be issued, among other reasons, due to "absconding", that is, leaving one's workplace for more than seven consecutive days. (The Arabic term *hurub*, literally "escape", expresses more precisely than the English term the kind of understanding of the employer-employee relation that underlies the law.) And this is what the four men's employer tried. Only two hours later, the company filed a demand for a ban against them. The lawsuit had no prospect of success, but it prevented them from leaving their company and taking up new jobs, which was an effective punishment. After one month, when some of the job offers they had received in Dubai had already expired, the company finally withdrew the claim for a ban, and began issuing cancellations of contract to the men.

> *The lawsuit had no prospect of success, but it prevented them from leaving their company and taking up new jobs, which was an effective punishment.*

And yet, others I met would have signed anytime for the jobs they were trying to

get out of. In Dubai in winter 2020-21, I came across a few people who were desperate to find any work that would come with a legal residence permit to prevent them from slipping into illegality.

In Part Three, we will meet other jobseekers who did not find work as quickly as T., and thus had to resort to other means to stay in the country. Read it here.

See part 1 of the series here.

Jobseekers in Dubai in the time of Covid-19 (I)

Fino
February, 2021

Arrivals to uncertainty

In mid-December 2020, my friend T. returned to Dubai from Egypt in the hope of getting his old job back or finding new work. His cousin H. and I went to pick him up at the airport.

T. had been out of the country on unpaid leave since the end of August, but he had been out of work since April. He used to work as a customer service agent at Dubai Airport, a work that he found interesting and demanding, as did many of his former colleagues whom I would soon learn to know. Working in security, check-in, customer service and other similar roles, they belonged to a vast proletarian service workforce that ran one of the world's leading aviation hubs. The nature of their work gave them a sense of cosmopolitan capital and a set of skills that exceeded the financial and contractual status of their work.

The nature of their work gave them a sense of cosmopolitan capital and a set of skills that exceeded the financial and contractual status of their work.

I had arrived a few days earlier on a trip enabled by Dubai's apparently stable Covid-19 situation in November and December, and the temporary immunity I gained through a mild but long case of Covid in the autumn. Like other anthropologists, I had cancelled all my fieldwork in 2020 due to the pandemic, and I have not learned to do remote ethnography over digital media. I wanted to write about houses that migrants build in their places of origin. But I could not visit those houses, and many of the builders could not continue building them due to the economic crisis that has resulted from the pandemic. And so I travelled to Dubai because it was the one place where I could go and where I knew some people, hoping to find out what other stories there might be to tell.

From December 2020 to January 2021, I spent almost two months in the metropolitan area of Dubai (which includes the emirates of Sharjah and Ajman), and I soon fell in love with the plurality of people, and the richness of their stories. I still hope to write about migrants' homes, and maybe there is also a story to tell about Egyptian-Filipino love affairs. But now, with this essay, I want to tell a more urgent story that is related to the current moment: a great number of people are looking for jobs in the unique situation brought about by the pandemic, while Dubai is transitioning from oil and contract-labour economy to a neoliberal trade hub with a flexible labour market.

Tragically for T. and his colleagues, aviation became the sector most heavily affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. When the United Arab Emirates went into a three-months lockdown in late March 2020, the entire airport was closed. When it was finally reopened in the summer, operations returned at a very reduced scale. Until July, T. had lived without income in the company accommodation, officially on their payroll but jobless and penniless. His colleagues and he relied on private charities for food. In July, T. left the eerily empty company accommodation that used to house over 1000 people (in the end, only 80 remained), and moved to a private room where a friend from his village allowed him to stay for free. By end of August he was sent on unpaid leave by the company, and boarded a plane to Egypt.

By December, flight routes were gradually being reopened for a winter tourist season, but still only two of the three terminals were in operation, and most former airport workers were still out of work. At the same time, more and more among those who had left the UAE during the spring or summer were returning to Dubai as long as their residence permits were still valid, hoping to find work.

> *But many migrant workers who returned home during the Covid spring and summer of 2020 were still at home, and didn't know when and how to get back to their work sites in the Gulf.*

We had breakfast and tea near the airport, and T. told us his news. "The situation in Egypt is economically very bad", he said, "and it wracks people's nerves." Others in his extended family were looking for a way to leave, too. But many migrant workers who returned home during the Covid spring and summer of 2020 were still at home, and didn't know when and how to get back to their work sites in the Gulf, either because they lacked the funds, or because they found the risk of returning without tangible prospects too grave. T. was lucky to have some modest assets that he could mobilise for the cost of the plane ticket, a PCR test, and a little cash for food and transportation. Importantly, he had the social capital of contacts in Dubai who might provide him information and help. Without those, he would not have come in the first place.

During the next days, as he began his search for work, he outlined his plan. Two years ago, he started building a new house at the outskirts of his village in Egypt, and he needs to work here in Dubai for two more years to see its construction to completion. Then he wants to settle down – but he doesn't know what his plan will be after that. The prospect of a future after a definitive return is vague, even frightening, and he admitted that he had no idea how to make ends meet then. At the same time, he was affirmative that two more years would be enough of *ghurba* (living away from home) for him. He has worked altogether for nine years abroad, and he is in his late 30s. Soon, it will be enough for him.

> *His residence permit was going to expire in mid-February, and then a 30-days*

grace period would remain. That's how long he had.

But first, he had to find work. His plan A was to be called back to duty by his company in case the operations at the airport picked up again. His plan B was to find work at another company, preferably at the airport, because it was the work he knew and liked best. His worst-case plan C was to collect his end-of-service payment from his employer, which would be just enough to pay his debts, and return to Egypt. His residence permit was going to expire in mid-February, and then a 30-days grace period would remain. That's how long he had.

The city-state of Dubai, an emirate with far-reaching autonomy in the federal state of the UAE, has been a forerunner of neoliberalism in the Gulf, relying on speculative investment, trade, tourism, transportation, as well as all kinds of business practices enabled by the overall low level of regulation. (I have heard many allegations of Dubai being a money-laundering hub.) In short, Dubai thrives on openness, and is appreciated for that reason also by people I have met here. Egyptian and Filipino workers as well as Egyptian and Sudanese white-collar employees who have been my main contacts here, have all told me that Dubai invites one to live and spend one's money here. The older stereotypes of Gulf countries assume a duality of nationals and migrants, where oil money is spent to hire engineers, teachers, and workers to provide infrastructures, education and services to a privileged minority of citizens. The UAE is an oil-rich country thanks to the large reserves of Abu Dhabi. But the emirate of Dubai ran out of oil already some time ago, and the little oil money it had was spent well to lay the foundations for a global trade hub. Today, a spectacle of consumer pluralism produced by migrants for other migrants is an important pillar of the city's economy.

Egyptians whom I have met here repeatedly told me that working in Dubai both requires and produces a more cosmopolitan and sophisticated attitude than Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. Egyptians in Dubai regularly eat South Asian food, which Egyptians in other Gulf countries tend to avoid. An Egyptian who previously

worked in Kuwait told me that he entered an Indian restaurant for the first time in Dubai. Dating and marriages between Egyptian men and Filipina women who meet at workplaces are common, enabled by the normality of mixed-gender sociality and, only since recently, also the legalisation of cohabitation of unmarried couples in most emirates of the UAE. Depictions of Gulf cosmopolitanism have tended to locate it at the higher income scales where contacts across different nationalities are more frequent and normalised, but it's worth noting that also a few low-income workers find appeal in it.

Dubai's lifestyle freedom comes with conditions, however.

Dubai's lifestyle freedom comes with conditions, however. One of its flip sides is the complete absence of any political freedom. Months earlier, the UAE had normalised its relations with Israel, which was a highly controversial move in the Arab world. Practically nobody I met dared to express an opinion about it. Another flip side is the constant fear of contract cancellation and deportation. Migrants who can afford to have a family here are drawn to the well-ordered life in comfort and freedom, which they can maintain here much more easily than in Egypt, and yet they also acknowledge that "there is no stability here: you may have to leave anytime," as an Egyptian born and raised in Sharjah put it to me.

The most tangible flip side that the jobseekers at time of Covid felt, however, was the uncertainty and precariousness of their prospective livelihoods – which is a general feature, in fact a productive condition of neoliberal economies that require individuals to work on themselves and their skills, take risks and seek for constantly new opportunities in the absence of safe and stable conditions to rely on and relax in.

In Part Two, T. finds a new job, but it makes him even more stressed and worried. Read it here.

All pictures by author

Sensing the Translation: Language and Medico-Legal Enactments of Expertise in Occupational Diseases Lawsuits in Turkey

Zeynel Gul
February, 2021

When: 12 February 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET

Link: https://zoom.us/j/93210372616pwd=dTZZ...

ID: 93210372616

Password: 4JzWZ6

Abstract

This paper examines how expert witness reports use the grammatical components of Turkish language such as evidentials and tense-structure to produce, contest, and redefine medico-legal evidence in occupational diseases lawsuits in Turkey. Turkey ranks lowest in occupational diseases in Europe. This is curious, because Turkey ranks first in Europe in deadly occupational accidents. A critical look at the official statistics partly explains this discrepancy. For example, in 2013, only three percent of applicants for occupational disease certification at expert hospitals were granted certificates making them eligible for compensation. On the other hand, thirty-one percent of workers with occupational accidents were granted compensation (SGK 2013). Unlike occupational accidents where causality is evident because of the specificity of the time and space in which the accident occurs, many occupational diseases unfold over several years and their stabilization as disease is enmeshed in a host of medico-legal institutions and social actors. Drawing on an ongoing ethnographic research on documentation of occupational diseases in Turkey, this paper argues that the dispersed unfolding of occupational diseases shapes the translation of uncertain bio-social realities of the patients by experts into legal causation in tort cases. How are the wounds of laboring translated between medical and legal reasonings regulating occupational injury claims in Turkey? What work does this forensic translation by experts do for the authority of medical knowledge and that of law? How do forms of narrating in/direct experience in Turkish language inform certainty expectations of law, and uncertainties of scientific knowledge for occupational diseases?

See you on Zoom!

Here is the full schedule of the webinar series.
You can also access the webinar videos on Allegra's YouTube channel.

Smith on Heroin. A Short Film by Smith & Willing

Paul Antick
February, 2021

https://vimeo.com/466574928
For more information about Smith & Willing*, see: www.smithandwilling.com*

Smith and Willing are fictional characters and in the following interview that accompanies this film, they discuss with an anonymous interviewer the relationship between lens-based technologies, audience expectations, and Smith on Heroin's *capacity to invoke feelings of 'stuck-ness'. In doing so, they reflect on the ways and extent to which a film audience's felt or affective responses can be structured ideologically.*

Smith and Willing is a Paul Antick project.

Smith on Heroin. An Interview with Smith & Willing

Interviewer: I'm interested in the use of the fixed camera position in *Smith on Heroin* and the way that it potentially engenders a feeling of 'stuck-ness' in the viewer. I say this because I personally felt very 'stuck' when I was watching your film. Also, given that the film seems to implicitly reference photography – courtesy of said camera position – I wonder if you could say something about that as well, I mean specifically in relation to the idea and feeling of 'stuck-ness'?

S&W: The thing about 'stuck-ness' hadn't really occurred to us until a friend of ours recently told us more or less exactly the same thing you just did. She asked us if there was anything about the film – some kind of formal device peculiar to the film itself – which, in our opinion, could have made her feel the way that she did when she watched it – i.e. stuck. We said we didn't know. But then, it occurred to us that this feeling of stuck-ness could have more to do with what consumers expect a film to *do*, and the extent to which those expectations are frustrated, than anything inside the film itself – an implied camera position, for instance.

Interviewer: What do you mean?

S&W: One of the things that distinguishes the idea of photography from film is that audiences don't generally expect a photograph to reveal more information within the frame of the photograph than what is initially made available to them. Over a period of time, the viewer might see or notice more things, more objects, in a photograph, but that isn't because the photograph has actually made more things available to them. Moreover, someone engaging with a photograph doesn't generally expect to be led through the scene in the photograph and, as a result, to find additional visual information in and about the scene. Despite the fact that the context in which any photographic image appears will, in one way or another, impact the value or meaning of an image, and regardless of the speed at which photographs are now routinely exchanged across innumerable online platforms, it seems to be the case that irrespective of the context of its distribution, our knowledge of what's actually being denoted in the photograph itself is still based almost entirely on what appears to have been the case from the get-go. (If differences do emerge between one version of a photograph and another then perhaps it makes more sense to talk not about different versions of a photograph but about the existence of a completely different image altogether.) Finally, there is this expectation that most of us have when we look at a photograph, that we'll remain exactly where we always have been in relation to the 'world' contained in it. This is based on having engaged with innumerable photographs before – all of which obeyed the same basic principle: a commitment to the idea and practice of 'immobility'.

Our expectations of film in relation to the idea of movement are usually quite different. Partly because the idea of film itself is actually predicated on the possibility of movement, which usually occurs in at least two ways. Evidently it involves the movement of objects through the film space itself. Within a particular scene, for example. People walking across a street; a truck going by, or whatever. But the film also contains the possibility of movement by the audience – or at least the hallucination of a kind of movement. This effect is triggered by an identification with the often rapidly fluctuating changes in camera position.

Which, courtesy of the editing process, are eventually stitched together to provide the viewer with a relatively seamless, although not necessarily naturalistic, journey through the film space. This is what film's meant to do! This is what we generally *expect* it to do! Despite the relative popularity and familiarity of so-called 'slow' or 'still' films, by people like Andy Warhol, Sam Taylor-Wood, James Benning, *Béla* Tarr etc., it's curious how when we watch them, Smith and I still often feel like we're watching, and also actively participating in, the perpetration of a tiny act of symbolic violence – 'This film isn't doing what a film should be doing!' – the thrill of which compensates, to some extent perhaps, for the feelings of boredom that we also sometimes experience when we're watching them. The point being that if the value or potency of this kind of 'violence' was merely contingent on the absence of movement in a scene, by which we mean the absence of what appear to be different camera positions, then the photograph would presumably engender similar feelings – of 'stuck-ness', for example. But photographs don't generally do that, mainly because, as we say: no one seriously *expects* them to.

> *The point being that if the value or potency of this kind of 'violence' was merely contingent on the absence of movement in a scene, by which we mean the absence of what appear to be different camera positions, then the photograph would presumably engender similar feelings – of 'stuck-ness', for example.*

So, the feeling of 'stuck-ness' you mentioned at the beginning has something to do with what film implicitly promises to do for us, and the extent to which its betrayal, of both the promise it made and the expectations that arose from that promise, can invoke feelings of disappointment, frustration, and disorientation. In *Smith on Heroin*, these feelings are specifically inflected, thanks to the camera position, with this quality of 'stuck-ness'. To reiterate, though, we think that the feeling of 'stuck-ness' has as much to do with what one expects in the first place, as it does with anything purely technical. It's perhaps interesting to consider at this point the extent to which a non-naturalistic anthropological film like this one might provoke a similar set of responses, precisely because its anti-naturalism

could also disappoint the expectations and demands of those viewers for whom the ‘anthropological’ film can only by definition be ‘anthropological’ if it is devotedly naturalistic.

Interviewer: Can you say a few words about the representation of drug use in the film? You haven’t mentioned that at all so far, which seems strange to me given that the film is after all called *Smith on Heroin*. I was *expecting* you to mention it.

S&W: It’s been a long time since Smith and I used heroin. When we did, there was nothing very glamorous’ about any of it – or degenerate either for that matter. We say this because our experiences back then – it was a long time ago! – actually had very little in common with most of the ‘addiction stories’, or narratives, that seemed to be around at the time – or, with a few notable exceptions, that we’ve ever engaged with since, except insofar as they structured some of our own junkie fantasies, about ourselves I mean, and the kind of roles that we imagined for ourselves. Fantasies that often jarred with the physical practicalities and necessities – the realities, so to speak – of our own everyday lives. It seems to us that most of these narratives were stuck in, or stuck somewhere in between, two divergent ideas of abjection. The first was typified by the kind of public information films about the ‘dangers of heroin’ that Smith and I had to watch at school in the late 1970s, in which the dereliction of the user’s body was usually conceived in purely eugenic terms: their physical abjection basically functioning as a sign of an intrinsically and irredeemably degenerate personality or character. We thought those films were just great! We wanted to be just like the people in them. Perhaps because the condition which these films described was, so far as we were concerned, the first necessary step on the user’s long and appealingly arduous journey to another kind of condition, the one represented in those other more romantic, more ‘positive’ – but in many ways no more or less absurd – images of abjection that we were also familiar with. Images of abjection as a redemptive event, where the user’s wretched demeanour signals what appears to be a wholly rational, in the circumstances, repudiation of an especially wretched social system, the effects of which are precisely what heroin appears to inoculate the user against. Here the user, or more specifically, the

user's body, which is invariably male, operates as an ironic and also deeply paradoxical sign in which, typically, the user's dissociated gaze – (their dreamy distracted eyes) – provides us with vital visual evidence of their having finally ascended, Christ-like, to an elevated position of spiritual good health and quasi-moral authority. Think images of a 'beautiful', out of it Keith Richards, circa 1971, suffering the pleasures and pains of heroin use for us. For our sins and the sins of our culture, our history, our politics etc. etc. *ad infinitum* – on the front pages of newspapers, in music and fashion magazines, and now of course in videos on YouTube.

> *Here the user, or more specifically, the user's body, which is invariably male, operates as an ironic and also deeply paradoxical sign in which, typically, the user's dissociated gaze – (their dreamy distracted eyes) – provides us with vital visual evidence of their having finally ascended, Christ-like, to an elevated position of spiritual good health and quasi-moral authority.*

Interviewer: Smith is no Keith Richards!

S&W: No. And we're pleased that *Smith on Heroin* isn't like Robert Frank's *Cocksucker Blues* (1972) either – a film we like very much, incidentally.

Interviewer: To that extent, the user in your film certainly isn't constrained by, or stuck in, the tropes you just described, tropes through which many of us perhaps expect the figure of the 'junkie' to be constituted, even if perhaps his or her 'redemptive' value depends very much on the existence of tropes like that.

S&W: It's true! Smith isn't stuck like that. But unfortunately he is stuck in the UK in 2021! If the film's *about* anything, then for us it's probably about that as much as anything.

Interviewer: I think we'll end it there! Thanks very much.

Paul Antick would like to thank Margarita Palacios, Andy Porter, Sarita Jarmack, May, and Lina K. for their advice and support.

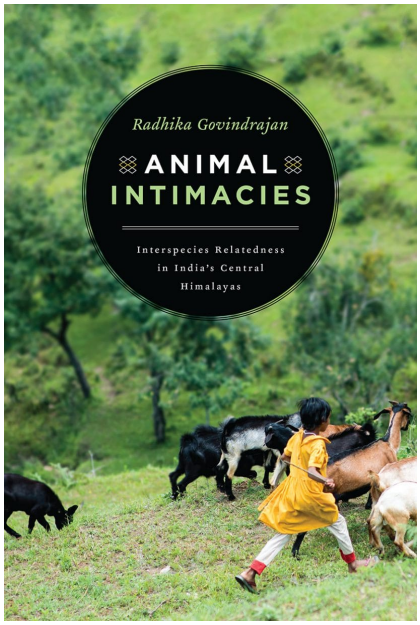
Featured image by Denise Jans (courtesy of Unsplash.com).

Animal Intimacies

Sanghamitra Padhy
February, 2021

The creative disentanglement of human-animal relationships in *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas* by Radhika Govindrajan is an important addition to the multispecies storytelling cannon and ethnography. Govindrajan's vivid exploration of bonds amongst humans and a variety of animal species in daily encounters, in the intimacies of care, love and violence, illuminate the 'contact zones' (Haraway 2008: 244) of human and non-human lives, politically and historically. The book reminds us of the importance of storytelling in the Anthropocene, of many kinds of storytelling, to dismantle the Human only history and visiblize our cohabitation with plants, animals, fungi, and microbes. Through her narrations of everyday encounters and species engagement, the author challenges the "hubris of assuming humans work alone" and claims "that human pasts, presents and futures are gathered with the pasts, presents and futures of the multiplicity of non-human animals who share worlds with them" (4).

By focusing on relatedness and kin making between humans and other beings, Govindarajan explores the fabric of politics and culture in Kumaon, thus decolonizing our gaze on human history.



Animal Intimacies begins with a promising endeavor to disentangle culture and species studies from modernist binaries of nature-culture, human-non human, self-other, and instead focuses on a reflexive analysis of our intertwined lives. The theoretical framing builds on Donna Harraway‘s multispecies history and the ways in which different species ‘become with’ other species (Harraway, 2008). She also borrows Janet Carsten’s concept of relatedness (Carsten, 2000) to examine the ways in which life always unfolds in relation to that of another. She provides intimate accounts of the lives of a variety of animals across different species through the material and affective labor of engagement to show that we are constituted through our relationships. Following Harraway and Carsten, she disentangles kin making from genealogy and species and argues that “relatedness always and already exceeds the human in its everyday doings in Kumaon” (6). Interspecies relatedness, she emphasizes, is simultaneously “desirable and undesirable” and is “decidedly uninnocent”. She states “mutuality and connections draw as much on incommensurable difference or hierarchy as ineffable affinity between particular individuals for its emergence” (4).

The attention to how hierarchy plays out in the daily proximities and entanglements between villagers and animals brings a unique lens to studying subjectivities and culture. Her methodology embodies what Anna Tsing (2015) calls ‘the art of noticing’. Govindrajan adds texture to these intimate species relations by showing animals as thinking and feeling subjects themselves. This is particularly well illustrated in the introductory story of Munni Rekhwaal and her three-year-old calf Radha, whom the author met while on a visit to *Simal* village in

Kumaon with a local NGO representative in the aftermath of a deadly storm. Munni's house, the first stop in the storm relief visit, visiblizes the knotty and inseparable lives of humans and animals. Govindrajan draws the reader to the intimate bond between Munni and Radha, as she describes how each took to the storm- Munni's return to her crumbled house and refusal to leave Radha and move to a safe location, Radha taking ill following Munni's brief absence during the dangerous storm, calling the village healer to attend to Radha, laying pine needles around Radha to provide warmth, and Radha's gentle response to Munni's overtures. The affection reveals the deep entanglement of lives and fates. Both well-being and misfortune, as seen in Munni's insistence on sticking with Radha despite the danger of leopard attack in her ruined house, are intertwined with the bonds and affective relations formed with animals.

Govindrajan draws attention to how living in a village in India's central Himalaya entails learning how to live with different animals. The chapters in the book explore this mutuality between villagers and animals through rich storytelling on the ritual sacrifice of goats, cow worship, monkey politics, conservation battles over wild hogs, sexual transgressions with bears in folklore and leopard intrusions. The stories elucidate how human animal relatedness is imbricated in the social fabric of Kumaon, especially in the hierarchies of gender, sexuality, caste, class and in religious nationalism and regional marginalization of *Paharis* from the plains people.

The book is filled with vivid, lively, and diverse interlocutors' accounts of embodied practices of human animal relatedness in the everyday lives of Kumaonis. The author elaborates the theoretical framework through six stories of relatedness. The first story describes the significance of the ritual sacrifice of goats in *Pahari* life; as the origin story of the ritual suggests goats are a literal replacement for human children and hence the bond with goats is akin to the affection for children. This chapter addresses the everyday gendered forms of labor in raising goats for sacrifice to the deities and the maternal bond that ties the sacrificer and the sacrificed, here between Neema Di and her goat. Neema Di shares:"Taking care of animals is an everyday ritual. But you see only the ritual of

sacrifice and then say that we don't really love our animals. It pains me every time I see one (of them) die. I feel such *mamta* (motherly affection) for them" (35). She explains that goat sacrifice in the local context of Kumaon is transactional, "where a lifetime of care and nourishment creates a debt that the sacrificial animal pays with his blood" (49) .

Chapter 3 aptly titled *The Cow Herself has Changed* navigates the complex lives, history, and character of cows as embodied in the everyday forms of relatedness to different cows and intimate knowledge of the bovine bodies that emerge through caring for cows. This is a significant intervention given the vitriolic rise of Hindu nationalism in India and the coercive enforcement of a ban on cow slaughter. Contrary to Hindutva claims, cow protection is fraught with violence; visible in the subversive rise in cow smuggling and trade by upper caste Hindus and lynching of Dalits, Muslims and Christians who engage in slaughter and skinning. Govindrajan examines how local markers distinguishing *Jersey*(foreign/modern breed, produced through artificial insemination) and *pahari* (hill) cows subvert Hindutva politics. For instance, she demonstrates how the government's rigorous promotion of dairy development and artificial insemination to increase milk production failed to address the friction between the emotive appeal to sacred cows and everyday practices of bodily exchange with cows. Hill people consider Pahari cows to be temperamentally and behaviorally different and claim a kin like affinity for the *Pahari* cow even though it is not economically lucrative. As noted by interlocutors, the milk generating and well-mannered *Jersey* cows lack the ritualistic power and strength of the head strong *Pahari* (native) cows; the latter's bodily products -milk, urine and dung- considered as pure and providing *shakti* (strength). This distinction between the pure and the modern bred cows filter into caste practices as well. Puran Ram, a Dalit villager, notes the coming of *Jersey* changed the practices of *choot* and *achoot* (touchability and untouchability) as upper castes do not hesitate to serve milk from *Jersey* cows to Dalits. He observes: "when the cow changed, everything changed. Now just look at how many people around us are sending these cows to the butcher. Would they have dared to do that with a *Pahari* cow"?

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The tension between insider and outsider and relatedness is further explored in chapter 4 where the author explores the distinction between *Pahari* monkeys and the invader monkeys from the plains. Monkeys hold a special place in Hindu religious imaginary as mischievous, 'good natured rogue', and hence their behavior, acts of pilfering, are dismissed by locals as playful. However, the infiltration of outsider monkeys complicates this relationship; it opens up a debate about who "belongs and more importantly to whom the mountains belong- who should have moral and material access to the scarce resources of the mountains" (94). The richly playful details of monkey politics vividly elucidate local animosity towards *non-pahari* settlers and outsider monkeys, and assertiveness of *Pahari* identity. The chapter guides the reader through behavioral distinctions between locals and outsiders, rural civility of locals versus the cunning, wild and aggressive outsiders. What is important here is the othering and exclusion of the outsiders- monkeys and humans- as they are entirely removed "from the affective circuits of interspecies sociality" (100). It is important to note that this is unlike how locals respond to invasive species such as the *Lantana*, a recognized alien, known to cause irreparable damage to the forests. To the interlocutors, outsider monkeys embody characteristics of a familiar species but are unfamiliar as individuals. Govindrajan observes: outsider monkeys provide the material metaphor to *Pahari's* political and affectiveanxieties about belonging, displacement and expropriation by people from the lowlands.

Chapter 5 focuses on colonial era conservation laws and the prohibition on hunting of wild animals by locals. It specifically addresses the arbitrary construct of 'wildness' in colonial and post-colonial conservation laws and local contestations of the distinction between 'wild' and 'domestic'. *Pahari* accounts of the origin of the wild boar – linked to a one-time incident of a pregnant pig

escaping to the forest supposedly under the tutelage of a Dalit worker at the Veterinary Institute (a vestige of colonial establishment) – illuminate local perceptions of the capriciousness of wildlife laws. Interlocutors' stories, as Govindrajan describes, rather point to the contingent and uneven history of animals: "And these bastards [wild boar] were domesticated [paltu] at some point. Ok, we can't kill leopards, that I understand. But pigs?" (122). What is convincing in the stories of the wilding of the pigs' bodies is the messiness and the impossibility of total human mastery over nature. The uneven and contingent nature of the pig's wildness reveals the fluid and unstable nature of categorizations be they between 'domestic' and 'wild' or as between 'wildness' and 'civility' commonly used by privileged groups to subordinate lower caste groups and Dalits. The 'run away sow' however, as Govindrajan powerfully claims, embodies the *otherwild*. The *otherwild* represents the unruliness of the pigs and the questioning of established structures of domination. More significantly, the *otherwild* recognizes non-human agency, thus destabilizing human centric imaginaries of the world.

> *What is convincing in the stories of the wilding of the pigs' bodies is the messiness and the impossibility of total human mastery over nature.*

The final chapter examines "bhalu ki baat", stories told by women in everyday conversations, in which bears have sex with women, hence questioning the boundaries between humans and animals. It is based on everyday accounts of living in proximity to the animals and observations of bear behavior. The bear stories- of love and violence- reflect their relationship with their husbands, which is sometimes sweet and sometimes marked by violence. The stories, as Govindrajan notes, have bearing on women's consciousness, feminine expressions of desire and a social world that frowns on their desires. This account opens up the inquiry into interspecies transgression and the "sensuous mingling of human and nonhuman animal bodies" (170). It introduces a radical perspective to a "world in which these norms separating the human from the animal are undone, and the shared tug of animal desire becomes a node of relatedness between

human and animal" (171). The epilogue ends with the complicated and entangled relationship between leopards and dogs, exposing the violence at the heart of relatedness. It brings attention to how animals' lives are joined, and this mutuality includes violence as seen in the relation between dogs and leopards in the villages- where a dog's life ends in a Leopard's grasp. As Bhaguli recognizes, "the loss of one life is essential to the renewal of another… "the recursive play ties live together in knots of relatedness" (176).

The vivid accounts of everyday practices of villagers living with animals, and the inclusive approach to human species relatedness in her stories enables the reader to recognize the multiplicity and diversity of experiences and subjectivities among different animals. By highlighting the connections, hierarchies, and differences that constitute and make human-animal interactions, the book elegantly argues that humanism is mixed up in relations with other species. The decentering of human experience and the recognition of the many forms of relationality, entanglements and involvement with other species, brings an extremely important addition to debates on the Anthropocene.

> *Govindrajan's attention to vulnerabilities in society through multispecies history opens up possibilities for decolonizing the Anthropocene.*

The acknowledgement of the Anthropocene by historians has been a critical turning point in recognizing the superficiality of nature-culture binaries and the destructive role of humans on a planetary scale (Chakrabarty, 2009). The rewriting of history to account for the human transformation of landscapes in the industrial era is no doubt a significant intervention. However, as multispecies ethnography shows, this history fails to address the question of unequal agency and unequal vulnerabilities, and remains human centered (Nixon, 2011). The attention to systemic characteristics that focus on the geological agency of human species or the global history of capital obliterate how humans have cohabited with other species and *become with* other species, how social relations are not limited to humans but thrive in the interspecies exchanges between plants, animals,

fungi, and microbes, how species relatedness shapes human history and politics, and how vulnerabilities are created and subverted. Multispecies entanglements and interactions holds invaluable lessons to how we may address anthropogenic climate change, extractive capitalism, environmental burdens, and viral outbreaks such as Ebola, HIV, Covid-19 etc.

Govindrajan's attention to vulnerabilities in society through multispecies history opens up possibilities for decolonizing the Anthropocene. It offers agency to the marginalized and challenges the inequalities that are at the crux of the Anthropocene. Her careful and detailed storytelling of village life in Central Himalayas, illuminates how cultural, social, political and economic forces are shaped in multispecies relationships. The book shows promising possibilities for envisioning how post humanism may "engage with the lessons of post colonialism and vice versa" (179).

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An Intellectual Odyssey. The Case of Legal Pluralism

Keebet Von Benda-Beckmann
February, 2021

When: 29 January 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET

Link: https://zoom.us/j/93210372616pwd=dTZZ...

ID: 93210372616

Password: 4JzWZ6

Abstract

Sally Merry was an active participant in the work of the project group “Legal Pluralism” at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology over many years. From the very beginning, she was also a Scientific Member of its Advisory Board. In this conversation, Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, who co-headed the project group at the MPI from 2000 until 2012, and Judith Beyer, her former PhD student and a member of the group until 2010, will talk about Sally’s role at the MPI, the importance of her work for legal pluralism in particular, and for legal anthropology in general.

We are going to review some of Sally’s theoretical ideas about the concept of legal pluralism: What was so provocative about it that Sally referred to its history as ‘an intellectual odyssey’? How did she explore it in her own ethnographic work? We will also discuss the possibility to think through her more recent themes of research on indicators and quantification in regard to the concept of legal pluralism. To expand the conversation, we invite the audience to contemplate the potential of revisiting the numerous debates Sally has initiated with the concept of legal pluralism in mind.

See you on Zoom!

Here is the full schedule of the webinar series.
You can also access the webinar videos on Allegra’s YouTube channel.

Today’s Totalitarianism – Call for Submissions

Today's Totalitarianism Editorial Collective
February, 2021

Today’s Totalitarianism welcomes written opinion pieces that increase our

awareness of the dangers we confront at this historical juncture anywhere in the world, of efforts to resist them, and of ways to reconfigure political life for the better. Essays should not exceed 1500 words and will be single-blind reviewed. Please contact Greg Feldman (greg@allegralaboratory.net) for queries and submissions.

We seek and provide accessible, critical analyses of today's global trends toward "totalitarianism". Though it may seem obsolete, we have chosen the term carefully to both define and combat systemic efforts in countries around the world to reduce plurality and to demand conformity among their inhabitants. Some may argue that use of the term "totalitarianism" signifies a contemporary overreaction in light of the mid-twentieth century horrors – Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Russia, or Mao's China – that called the term into existence. However, if the argument against this term is that such horrors have not yet begun in earnest, then that itself is sufficient evidence that enough has already gone wrong in global politics.

Others may argue that the term lumps together different political situations in a worn out category. However, it is too difficult to ignore the fact that countries in both the Global South and North – from the Philippines to Turkey from Brazil to Hungary from India to the United States from Russia to China – all feature trends that collectively reduce political plurality, demand obedience to centralized authority, and stifle dissent and free speech. Ironically, most of these cases are premised on democratically elected "Big Men" claiming a mandate from the people.

The sad diversity of examples finds coherence as a common phenomenon through certain themes and processes, even if they appear in different permutations and to different degrees; such themes and processes characterized twentieth century totalitarianism as well.

They include, but are not limited to, the following:

1) simplified narratives of history (along with increased dismissal of facts to the contrary);

2) systemic efforts to control public discussion (along with increased censorship and greater regulation of media);

3) hostility toward indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, women, racialized and casted minorities, the differently abled, and people with alternative gender and sexual orientations (along with an increase in masculine nationalism);

4) contempt for parliamentary procedures and independent judiciaries (along with an increased acceptance of unconstrained executive authority);

5) contempt for political plurality (along with an increase in narrowly defined ideas of patriotism, religious piety, and social conduct);

6) contempt for respectful, civil discourse (along with an increase in fear tactics against and public humiliation of political rivals and of "others");

7) pressure toward ideological conformity and the intolerance of intellectual diversity in public and professional life (along with a rise in "anti-elitism" claiming to speak truth to power).

Editor

Gre

g Feldman
(University of Windsor)

Associate Editors

Doing an Ethnography of Corruption

Smoki Musaraj
February, 2021

When: 15 January 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET

Link: https://zoom.us/j/93210372616pwd=dTZZ...

ID: 93210372616

Password: 4JzWZ6

Abstract

This webinar will explore how to do an anthropology of corruption. The webinar will be organized in two parts that draw from my research on corruption and anti-corruption in Albania. The first part takes inspiration from Sally Merry's recent work on indicators as technologies of governance and forms of knowledge (Merry, Davis and Kingsbury 2015; Rottenburg et al 2015) and my own participation in the research group on indicators that Merry co-led over many years. Based on my research on the making, circulation, and deployment of a corruption indicator in Albania (Musaraj 2015), I will reflect on how anthropologists can approach corruption (and other) indicators as an object of analysis. The second part takes inspiration from Sally Merry's courtroom ethnography and her work on legal pluralism (Merry 1988). Drawing from my current research into the judicial reform in Albania, I will discuss ways in which courtroom ethnography can provide key insights on how the corruption or integrity of judges and prosecutors is assessed in the vetting process set up under the monitoring of the European Union. Taking up examples from these hearings, the webinar will discuss how courtroom ethnography can provide crucial insights into the legal pluralism present in these judicial reforms, in Albania and other contexts. Through these two examples, the webinar seeks to generate a discussion of the various methodological and analytical tools that ethnographers can apply to the study of corruption.

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See you on Zoom!

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