“You Don’t Bring Me Flowers, so I Got Me Some”: Katie Numi Usher on the Fluid Mosaic

Katie Numi Usher
January, 2020

Introduction

I met Katie Numi Usher during a conference in London in 2018; she was invited as the winner of that year’s Bridget Jones Travel Award.

K. N. Usher presents two texts that are about the intersections (Particia Hills Collins, 2000)[1] between ideal representations of youth, family members, acceptability, self-love, and visibility in the racial stratification of postcolonial societies. They are two of her stream of consciousness writings; internal monologue that mix, as an oneiric world, the memories of the author. In both her texts the author embodies the energy of breaking metaphorically all combs. She refuses to domesticate proposing a hymn of body positivity and social inclusivity.

> *Her way of creating artistically resonates with the Fluid Mosaic project as if it functions as the membrane for the cells: it contains in a porous way the poietic activity. She shows through her writing a process of becoming in shape, as it happens with the cells in biology.*

Taking inspiration from the biological description of the fluid mosaic, she talks about the process of the transformation of her coiled hairs, and antipodal wishes of self-representation. She talks about her memories and desires of matching her representation with TV actors on Saved by the Bell "where the characters were swinging their hair". In this teenager series, the actors moved their coiffed hairs in a way that coiled people cannot do so easily. She continues criticizing the expression of 'relaxing the hairs', which is used in order to straighten the curls that apparently are visually excessively too 'agitated'. In order to 'relax' the hairs, the hot comb offers a temporal solution to the identity and the wishes of herself as a young girl. Her texts are a message to people who desperately want to look different from the way they do.

She voluntarily states her need and her will against the chameleon act of passing, that is carried through the theme of the Fluid Mosaic. With her poems, she does not want to 'pass' as a fiction of identity in a third state of perpetual social camouflage and change. On the contrary, she states boldly her will to embrace her positionality through her personal life, narrative and poetry.

> *With her works here, she challenges then the liminal state provided metaphorically by the theme of this project, claiming her non-partial but total*

existence and presence as an afrodescent woman and artist in Belizean society.

Our exchanges reflected on her inner state of change, on how she perceives herself, and the agency contained within self-love as power, following the concept of the Black feminist and poet Audre Lorde (1978-1982)[2].

KATIE NUMI USHER

You Don't Bring Me Flowers, so I Got Me Some

Katie Numi Usher 2019, Belize. Digital photo.

"The natural hair movement was in large part as a kind of rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards. But what happened often was that there was very much the emergence of like an idealised type of natural hair, which still conforms to Eurocentric norms. I would like there to be more disruption of the hegemonic beauty standard and more appreciation of the hair that was the most stigmatised of the black hair to begin with."

~ Emma Dabiri, Don't Touch My Hair[3]

The title of this piece was of course ripped off a 1978 song by Barbara Streisand and Neil Diamond. Clearly this song would not even have been in my consciousness, except for trying to impress my dad, by learning it word for word, chord for chord for a karaoke night duet.

> *This photo is a gathering of tools, tools I use to try to 'tame' my hair so that it won't rant, rage and rebel too much out in a world which still, even and especially in the natural hair movement is leaning heavily on any and all approximation to Eurocentric beauty standards.*

The aspiration, 'the hair-goal' is a curl, not a coil. And even if you have coils, you are told to moisturize the hell out of your strands, twist or braid it, let it dry and release, "very slowly to prevent frizz" (those exact words) a looser curl pattern, essentially what a braid-out or twist-out is, a correction of curl pattern. So I am no longer straightening my hair, but I am still pretending at a different hair pattern? This is a gathering of tools, but not in a toolbox, but as one would present a bouquet. Rare the times I have ever received a bouquet or even a kind word for my own hair in its natural state. Only stares, curiosity, the unannounced, uninvited tug of foreign fingers, even the word "tuff" (tough) not in a strong way, but in an undesirable and unyielding way, these are the things my hair receives. Well my hair has broken a comb or two in its day, true, but that is just one detail in a long twisted tale of what is my hair now. But this is exactly what happens when a space was created then quickly repurposed, one is left with one option alone, which is: to create a new space. A space which will celebrate what has been overlooked, and hair-pudding-ed into something else inside a movement which would have once, decades ago, praised your coils.

There is something really powerful in self-gifted bouquets. A celebration and a loving exist in that. So I arranged these combs, tools of 'handling' hair like mine, into a bouquet. Later the tugging and pulling can ensue, but for now just a kind bunch of tools to love my hair texture for itself, as it is.

There is so much wrapped up into how Black women are loved, not lusting over us, fantasizing, or better said fetishizing us, but actually loving us, and publicly showing it. Hence the bouquet, and for 4C hair at that.

Self-portrait, Katie Numi Usher, Belize. 2019.

I remember sat on the ground on a pillow, or on those tiny plastic chairs, between the legs of my aunt, or grandmother, or mom, or a cousin, a neighbour, or a babysitter, the comb parting lines through my poofy-cloud hair, the snagging, the ouch, the cool touch of petroleum (Dax, Blue Magic or one of the others I can't remember the names of now). I remember a tiny-quick slap of the comb's bristles on my shoulder because I had nodded off, I always fell asleep. Travelling in and out of sleep, and when I woke up, I would touch the sides of my head, beautiful braids, which felt like manicured shrubs lining houses. I grew up in Belmopan, all the nice rich people had those shrubs lining their yards. I remember the first time I heard it, one of the babysitters, a Latina, said it, that I had one single section of my hair which was "like Spanish! Gyal watch ya, everything tough, except dis wan lee section". I remember feeling curious, happy and sad, wanted to see it, wondered what made it better than the rest of my hair. I remember when my grandaunt stood for what felt like the whole day with a metal comb, she would place on the stove then pull through my hair. I remember my hair swinging like Lisa Turtle from Save by the Bell after that. I remember her face sunk with horror when she saw me running up trees and chasing my brother and cousins, my face swimming in sweat, my hair puffing at the roots, her three hours of turning cotton to shined silk, gone. I saw this stack on Dax "grease" as we call it in Belize, and the memories came a flood.

[1] Particia Hills Collins. 2000. *Black feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, New York: Routledge.

[2] Audre, Lorde. (1978-1982) *The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* New York: Penguin Modern.

[3] Emma Dabiri, 2019. *Don't touch my hair*, New York: Penguin.

Featured Image by Katie Numi Usher.

On the ‘Fluid Mosaic’

Maica Gugolati
January, 2020

Introduction

The theme of the Fluid mosaic offers an interdisciplinary journey, as Homi Bhabha would say (Bhabha 1994)[1] in-between different domains, such as visual art, dance, poetry, performance, songs, autoethnography, anthropology and biology.

This collaboration started with an abstract proposal in which the authors, most of whom were not familiar with the discipline of biology, were introduced to the theme. This proposal was left open so as to trigger various exchanges online, crossing the geographical borders that separated all the contributors, to encourage sharing across blurred and changing barriers: biological, social, racial, gender, environmental and political passing[2]-s (Ginsberg and al. 1996).

The authors and artists involved in this project come from different countries: Singapore (Wong Kwang Lin), Colombia (José Reyes), Trinidad and Tobago (Rodell Warner), Belize (Katie Numi Usher), Jamaica (Di-Andre Caprice Davis), Brazil-Portugal (Leticia Barreto), France (Ariane Benoit), Italy-Mozambique (Giulia Cavallo). The diversity of our national origins ensured the plurality of the research project. The process of forming the Fluid Mosaic in this way required the mediation of technologies, and the crossing of geographical time zones, as well as cultural and linguistic frontiers. The issues of living beings, movements, otherness, foreignness, migration, self-love, performance, spiritual journey among others emerged out of the various interpretations of the metaphor of the fluid mosaic.

> *Each interpretation of the biological theme mobilizes a different medium of expression.*

The Fluid Mosaic wants to experiment with dialogism (Todorov 1981)[3] between academic subjects and artistic practices and methodologies. The Fluid mosaic is not just an object of research. It allowed all of us to metaphorically swim, dive and float on the fluidity of shared creative discourse that became like a meta-discourse among diversities. As a social and visual anthropologist, I am in charge of the curatorial process and theoretical communication between the artists and researchers who contributed to this thread. I see my role as a mediator, creating links between the domains of art, anthropology and philosophy. With some authors the communication was constant, and changed according to the debate that unfolded around the theme, with others the communication took the form of a digital dialogue. I wrote an introduction for each of the projects so as to provide the audience with some guidance when approaching the material presented in this thread. The scientific ties and pertinences between all the contributions and the theme have been revised by Jorge Ramírez, who holds a PhD in neurobiology.

What is a Fluid Mosaic?

In biology, the 'fluid mosaic' is a model that explains the paradoxical nature of the living cell's membrane that acts as a porous and malleable barrier. The membrane represents a liminal border that is liquid, permeable, chaotic and unshaped, where mosaics form, deform and un-form. The mosaic is the assortment of functional 'bridges' embedded into this barrier that connect the exterior and interior parts of the cell. However, those bridges are neither fixed nor perpetual, they keep flowing inside the liquid border and eventually move outside of it. The bridges are not just crossed but they themselves traverse the membrane as well. While doing so, they create a disturbance, a crisscrossing changing phenomena in the membrane from which the mosaic and the cell are transformed. This act of passing is excessive and ephemeral. It implies an ever-changing state of the boundary of the cell that, in turn, mutates its identity.

Framing the fluid mosaic in this project, the "cells" can be interpreted as fluid and changeable entities or subjects that outline complex but not limited notions of liquidity (Bachelard 1942)[4], oceanic relations (Romain 1927)[5] of powers and pluriversality (Mignolo 2011)[6]. The fluid mosaic in the cells' membrane is constituted by three stages, similar to the stages of a rite of passage, as described by the ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep (1909)[7]: separation, incorporation and liminality. In biology, the stages are: the interior of the cells, the exterior and the membrane that is located in between the previous two. The elements pass through the membrane in order to gather nutrients, to dispose debris and to pass information.

The project

This project has been an exercise of trans-lation, not just in linguistic terms, but in terms of finding creative registers and subjective resonances, as well as narrowing the gaps between debates, feelings, experiences and scientific researches which could be perceived at first sight as situated on the antipodes of each other. Trans-lation from -trans ("across") and -latio ("carrying"), is a leitmotiv for this collective experiment made of entanglements, expertise and creations gathered together around the theme of the Fluid Mosaic.

The Fluid Mosaic project enabled us to play with the notion of the Laboratory, beyond the historical imaginary of an indoor building, questioning existential, creative and social laboratories that are in permanent contact with human lives.

> *It is a hymn to hybridity and 'mongrels', a struggle to find a sustainable, understandable common language that goes beyond institutional barriers, historical disciplinary constructions and imposed by academic status quo.*

We made the most out of the porosity that characterizes the digital platform so as to push the limits of the medium's creative power.

[1] Homi, Bhabha. 1994. *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge.

[2] The term passing (Ginsberg 1996) in sociology refers to the ability of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category different from their own, which may include racial identity, ethnicity, caste, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age and/or disability status. Elaine K. Ginsberg, Donald E. Pease. 1996. *Passing and the Fictions of Identity.* Durham: Duke University Press.

[3] Tzvetan, Todorov. 1981. *Mikhaïl Bakhtine. Le principe dialogique*. Paris: Seuil.

[4] The term liquidity can evoke shapeless, changeability. Liquid is a transitory element, ontologically metamorphic, it exists as a being in flux.

Gaston, Bachelard. [1942]1983, *Water and Dreams: An essay on the imagination of matter*, trans. E.R. Farrell, The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, Dallas.

[5] The "oceanic feeling" invoked by Rolland Romain (1927) evokes the feeling of limitless, and unbound.

[6] Pluriversality refers to a world entangled through and by the colonial matrix of power; it pinpoints the action of dwelling with borders and in the borders, as a decolonial practice.

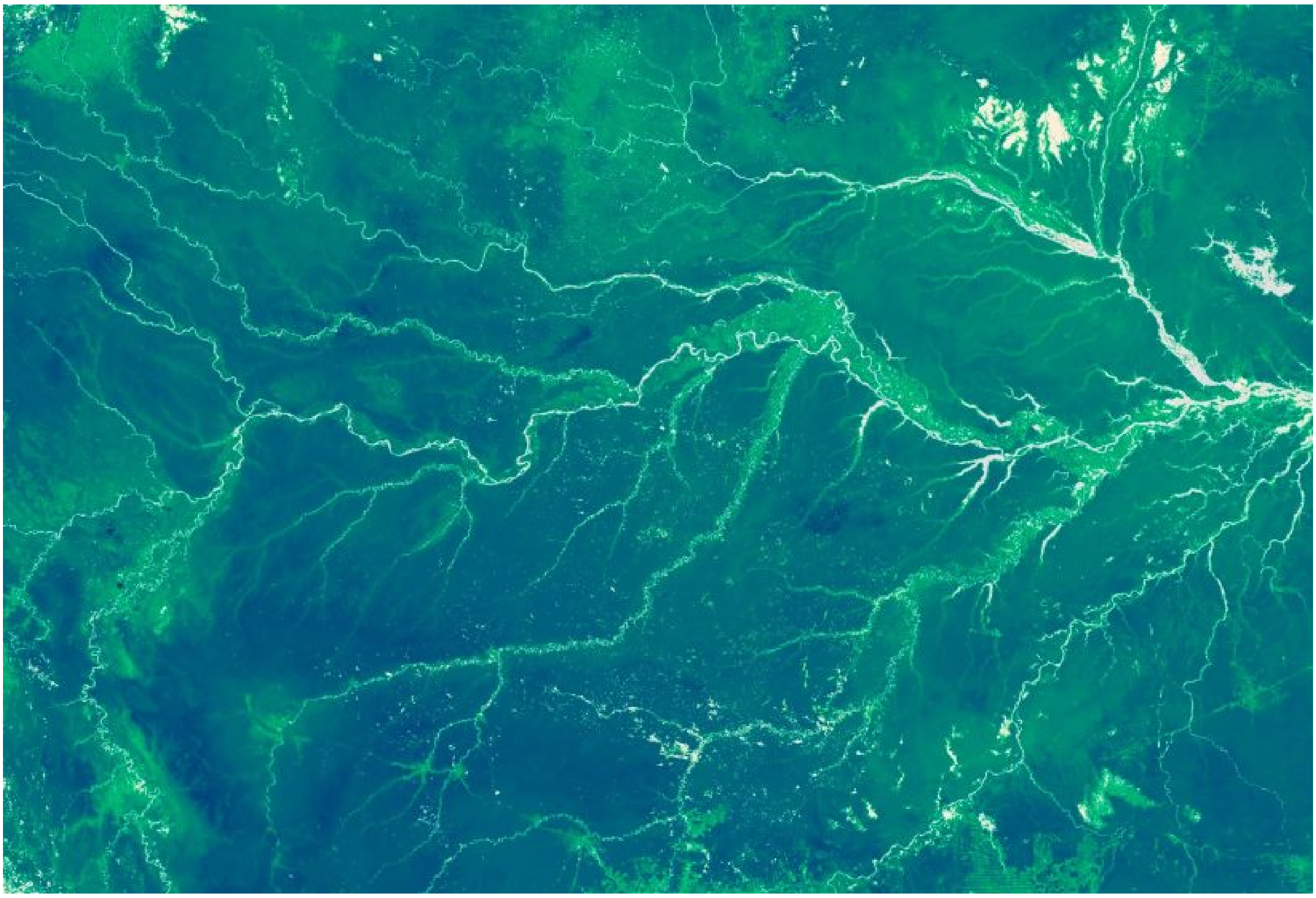
Walter, Mignolo, 2011. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity.* Durham: Duke University Press

[7] Van Gennep, Arnold. 1909. *Les rites de passage*. Paris: Émile Nourry

Feature Image (cropped) by Maica Gugolati

Call for Reviews: Anthropology of Climate Change and the Environment

Allegra
January, 2020

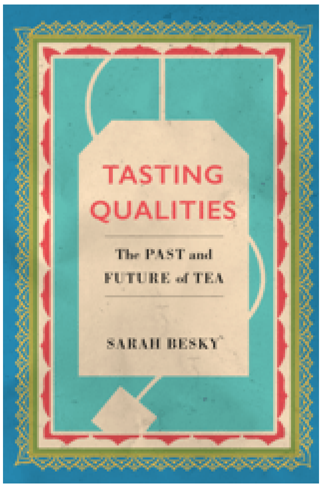


As 2020 started with the apocalyptic images of the Australian bush-fires, we at Allegra, felt there was an emergency to feature the work of environmental anthropologists so as to become better informed of how we can join the struggle against climate change and reinvent our relationship to nature. We therefore selected for you a series of recently published books discussing a wide range of related topics, including water, food, techno sciences, forest conservation and global justice. How is neoliberal capitalism destroying our planet? Should water be considered a global public good? Should we trust scientific discoveries for solving the problem of global warming? What can indigenous forms of knowledge teach us about nature conservation? The books gathered in this list bring ethnographically informed answers to these questions…and more! Get in touch with us if you are interested in reviewing one of them!

How to Proceed:

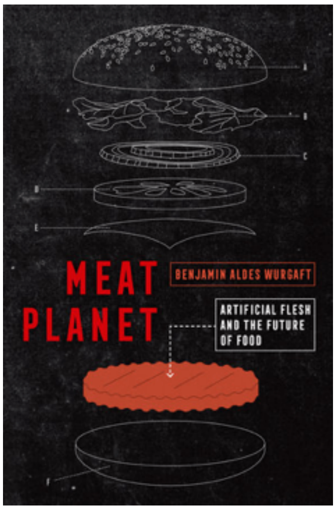
As we receive many requests for reviews, please send an email to reviews@allegralaboratory.net indicating which book you would like to review, your postal address, and 2-3 sentences explaining why you should be reviewing the book. Please explain how the book relates to your own research or interests. We will get back to you once we have selected the reviewers.

Sarah Besky. 2020. *Tasting Qualities: The Past and Future of Tea.* University of California Press.



What is the place of quality in contemporary capitalism? How is a product as ordinary as a bag of tea valued for its quality? In her innovative study, Sarah Besky addresses these questions by going inside an Indian auction house where experts taste and value mass-market black tea, one of the world's most recognized commodities. Pairing rich historical data with ethnographic research among agronomists, professional tea tasters and traders, and tea plantation workers, Besky shows how the meaning of quality has been subjected to nearly constant experimentation and debate over the history of the tea industry. Working across political economy, science and technology studies, and sensory ethnography, *Tasting Qualities* argues for an approach to quality that sees it not as a final destination for economic, imperial, or post-imperial projects but as an opening for those projects.

Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft. 2019. *Meat Planet: Artificial Flesh and the Future of Food.* University of California Press.

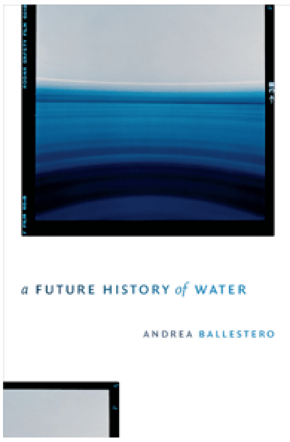


In 2013, a Dutch scientist unveiled the world's first laboratory-created hamburger. Since then, the idea of producing meat, not from live animals but from carefully cultured tissues, has spread like wildfire through the media. Meanwhile, cultured meat researchers race against population growth and climate change in an effort to make sustainable protein. *Meat Planet*explores the quest to generate meat in the lab—a substance sometimes called "cultured meat"—and asks what it means to imagine that this is the future of food.

Neither an advocate nor a critic of cultured meat, Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft spent five years researching the phenomenon. In *Meat Planet,* he reveals how debates about lab-grown meat reach beyond debates about food, examining the links between appetite, growth, and capitalism. Could satiating the growing appetite for meat actually lead to our undoing? Are we simply using one technology to undo the damage caused by another? Like all problems in our food system, the meat problem is not merely a problem of production. It is intrinsically social and political, and it demands that we examine questions of justice and desirable modes of living in a shared and finite world.

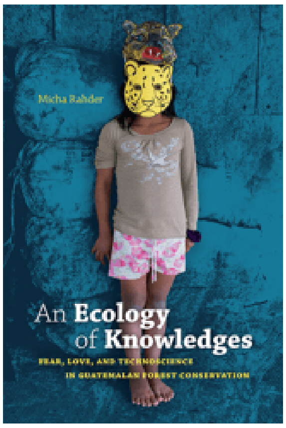
Benjamin Wurgaft tells a story that could utterly transform the way we think of animals, the way we relate to farmland, the way we use water, and the way we think about population and our fragile ecosystem's capacity to sustain life. He argues that even if cultured meat does not "succeed," it functions—much like science fiction—as a crucial mirror that we can hold up to our contemporary fleshy dysfunctions.

Andrea Ballestero. 2019. *A Future History of Water.* Duke University Press.



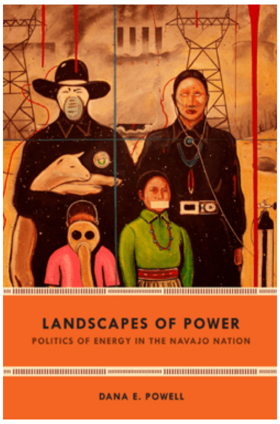
Based on fieldwork among state officials, NGOs, politicians, and activists in Costa Rica and Brazil, *A Future History of Water* traces the unspectacular work necessary to make water access a human right and a human right something different from a commodity. Andrea Ballestero shows how these ephemeral distinctions are made through four technolegal devices—formula, index, list and pact. She argues that what is at stake in these devices is not the making of a distinct future but what counts as the future in the first place. *A Future History of Water* is an ethnographically rich and conceptually charged journey into ant-filled water meters, fantastical water taxonomies, promises captured on slips of paper, and statistical maneuvers that dissolve the human of human rights. Ultimately, Ballestero demonstrates what happens when instead of trying to fix its meaning, we make water's changing form the precondition of our analyses.

Micha Rahder. 2020. *An Ecology of Knowledges: Fear, Love, and Technoscience in Guatemalan Forest Conservation.* Duke University Press.



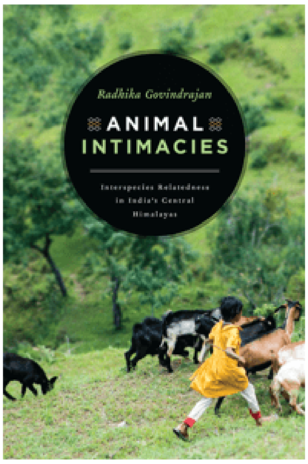
Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR), the largest protected area in Central America, is characterized by rampant violence, social and ethnic inequality, and rapid deforestation. Faced with these threats, local residents, conservationists, scientists, and NGOs in the region work within what Micha Rahder calls "an ecology of knowledges," in which interventions on the MBR landscape are tied to differing and sometimes competing forms of knowing. In this book, Rahder examines how technoscience, endemic violence, and an embodied love of wild species and places shape conservation practices in Guatemala. Rahder highlights how different forms of environmental knowledge emerge from encounters and relations between humans and nonhumans, institutions and local actors, and how situated ways of knowing impact conservation practices and natural places, often in unexpected and unintended ways. In so doing, she opens up new ways of thinking about the complexities of environmental knowledge and conservation in the context of instability, inequality, and violence around the world.

Dana Powell. 2018. *Landscapes of Power: Politics of Energy in the Navajo Nation.* Duke University Press.



In *Landscapes of Power* Dana E. Powell examines the rise and fall of the controversial Desert Rock Power Plant initiative in New Mexico to trace the political conflicts surrounding native sovereignty and contemporary energy development on Navajo (Diné) Nation land. Powell's historical and ethnographic account shows how the coal-fired power plant project's defeat provided the basis for redefining the legacies of colonialism, mineral extraction, and environmentalism. Examining the labor of activists, artists, politicians, elders, technicians, and others, Powell emphasizes the generative potential of Navajo resistance to articulate a vision of autonomy in the face of twenty-first-century colonial conditions. Ultimately, Powell situates local Navajo struggles over energy technology and infrastructure within broader sociocultural life, debates over global climate change, and tribal, federal, and global politics of extraction.

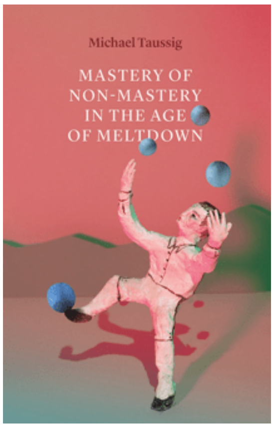
Radhika Govindrajan. 2018. *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas.* University of Chicago Press.



What does it mean to live and die in relation to other animals? *Animal Intimacies* posits this central question alongside the intimate—and intense—moments of care, kinship, violence, politics, indifference, and desire that occur between human and non-human animals.

Built on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the mountain villages of India's Central Himalayas, Radhika Govindrajan's book explores the number of ways that human and animal interact to cultivate relationships as interconnected, related beings. Whether it is through the study of the affect and ethics of ritual animal sacrifice, analysis of the right-wing political project of cow-protection, or examination of villagers' talk about bears who abduct women and have sex with them, Govindrajan illustrates that multispecies relatedness relies on both difference and ineffable affinity between animals. *Animal Intimacies* breaks substantial new ground in animal studies, and Govindrajan's detailed portrait of the social, political and religious life of the region will be of interest to cultural anthropologists and scholars of South Asia as well.

Michael Taussig. 2020. *Mastery of Non-Mastery in the Age of Meltdown.* The University of Chicago Press.



For centuries, humans have excelled at mimicking nature in order to exploit it. Now, with the existential threat of global climate change on the horizon, the ever-provocative Michael Taussig asks what function a newly invigorated mimetic faculty might exert along with such change. *Mastery of Non- Mastery in the Age of Meltdown* is not solely a reflection on our condition but also a theoretical effort to reckon with the impulses that have fed our relentless ambition for dominance over nature.

Taussig seeks to move us away from the manipulation of nature and reorient us to different metaphors and sources of inspiration to develop a new ethical stance toward the world. His ultimate goal is to undo his readers' sense of control and engender what he calls "mastery of non-mastery." This unique book developed out of Taussig's work with peasant agriculture and his artistic practice, which brings performance art together with aspects of ritual. Through immersive meditations on Walter Benjamin, D. H. Lawrence, Emerson, Bataille, and Proust, Taussig grapples with the possibility of collapse and with the responsibility we bear for it.

Les Beldo. 2019. *Contesting Leviathan: Activists, Hunters, and State Power in the Makah Whaling Conflict.* The University of Chicago Press.

In 1999, off the coast of the Pacific Northwest, the first gray whale in seven decades was killed by Makah whalers. The hunt marked the return of a centuries-old tradition and, predictably, set off a fierce political and environmental debate. Whalers from the Makah Indian Tribe and antiwhaling activists have clashed for over twenty years, with no end to this conflict in sight.

In *Contesting Leviathan*, anthropologist Les Beldo describes the complex judicial and political climate for whale conservation in the United States, and the limits of the current framework in which whales are treated as “large fish” managed by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Emphasizing the moral dimension of the conflict between the Makah, the US government, and antiwhaling activists, Beldo brings to light the lived ethics of human-animal interaction, as well as how different groups claim to speak for the whale—the only silent party in this conflict. A timely and sensitive study of a complicated issue, this book calls into question anthropological expectations regarding who benefits from the exercise of state power in environmental conflicts, especially where indigenous groups are involved. Vividly told and rigorously argued, *Contesting Leviathan* will appeal to anthropologists, scholars of indigenous culture, animal activists, and any reader interested in the place of animals in contemporary life.

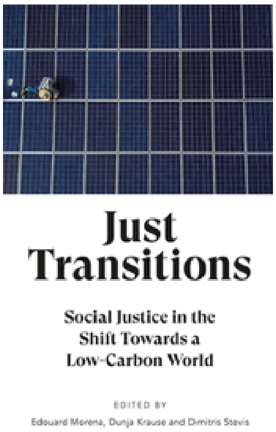
Astrid B. Stensrud and Thomas Hylland Eriksen(eds.). 2019. *Climate, Capitalism and Communities: An Anthropology of Environmental Overheating.* Pluto Press.

Until now, the growing body of work on environmental anthropology has largely ignored the unavoidable impact of global capitalism on the environment and the extent to which capital itself is a key driver of climate change.

Climate, Capitalism and Communities focuses explicitly on that nexus, examining the injustices and inequalities – as well as the activist responses – that have arisen as a result, and the contradictions between the imperatives of exponential economic growth, and those of environmental sustainability, and society as a whole.

Bringing an innovative, ethnographic toolkit to bear on a crisis that is at once global and highly localised, the authors shift attention away from the consequences of climate change, to a focus on the social relations and power structures that continue to prevent effective action.

Edouard Morena, Dunja Krause and Dimitris Stevis (eds.). *Just Transitions: Social Justice in the Shift Towards a Low-Carbon World.* Pluto Press.



In the field of 'climate change', no terrain goes uncontested. The terminological tug of war between activists and corporations, scientists and governments, has seen radical notions of 'sustainability' emptied of urgency and subordinated to the interests of capital. 'Just Transition' is the latest such battleground, and the conceptual keystone of the post-COP21 climate policy world. But what does it really mean?

Just Transition emerged as a framework developed within the trade union movement to encompass a range of social interventions needed to secure workers' and frontline communities' jobs and livelihoods as economies shift to sustainable production. *Just Transitions* draws on a range of perspectives from the global North and South to interrogate the overlaps, synergies and tensions between various understandings of the Just Transition approach. As the concept is entering the mainstream, has it lost its radical edge, and if so, can it be recovered?

Written by academics and activists from around the globe, this unique edited collection is the first book entirely devoted to Just Transition.

Allegra review guidelines:

All reviews should be completed within three months of the receipt of the book.

We use British English (i.e. use –ise and not –ize word endings). We encourage clear expression and simple sentence structures especially if English is not your first language.

Word limit: 750-1500 words.

Font: Times New Roman.

Size: 12.

Line Spacing: 1,5

No footnotes.

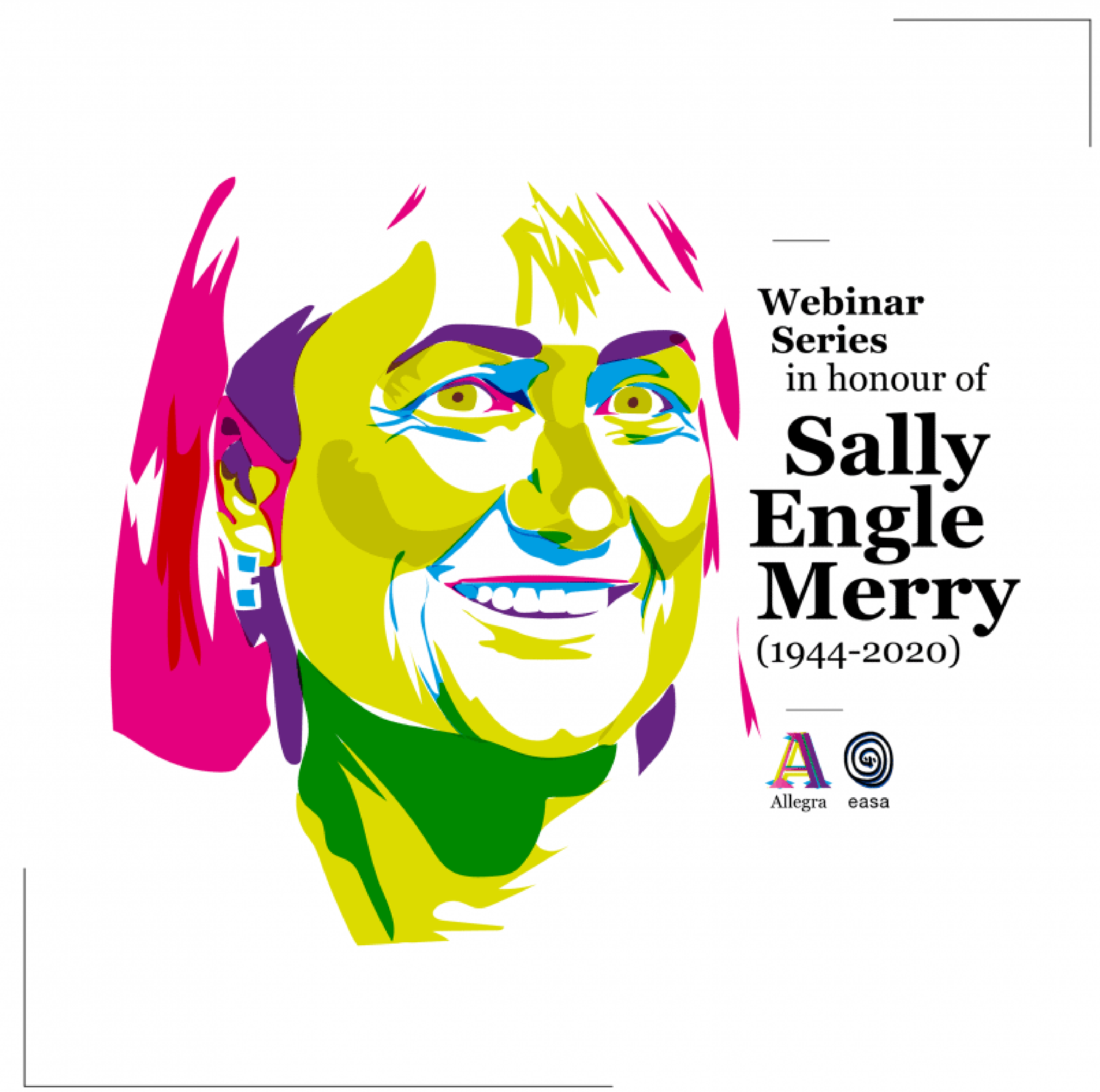
If you cite other authors, please reference their publication in the end.

When submitting the review, do not forget to include your name, (academic) affiliation (if any), a photograph of yourself and a short bio of 2-3 sentences.

Featured Image *by NASA Earth Observatory*

Webinar Series in honour of Sally Engle Merry (1944-2020)

Allegra
January, 2020



From 11 Decembre 2020 to 28 May 2021

Co-organised by Allegra Lab and EASA LawNet.

This series of online talks features presentations that examine the current state of legal anthropology. These webinars are dedicated to Sally Engle Merry, Professor of Anthropology at New York University, President of the Law and Society Association, the American Ethnological Society, and the Association for Political and Legal Anthropology. Sally passed away on 8th September 2020. Her pioneering work on culture and rights, gender violence, and indicators has been highly influential on the subdiscipline and beyond. In memory of her generosity as a teacher and colleague, and in line with her innovative spirit and gentle soul, the seminars are an opportunity for young and more established scholars to engage in vigorous conversations on legal matters of critical relevance to contemporary societal debates.

See you on Zoom!

Link: https://zoom.us/j/93210372616…
ID: 93210372616
Password: 4JzWZ6

Save the dates! (On Fridays)

 11 December 2020 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Heeding anthropological mottos in the study of law” by M-B Dembour (Ghent University)
Discussant: Julie Billaud (Graduate Institute in Geneva)
 15 January 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Doing an ethnography of corruption” by Smoki Musaraj (Ohio University)
Discussant: Birgit Müller (EHESS/CNRS)
 29 January 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“An intellectual odyssey. The case of legal pluralism.” Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology) in conversation with Judith Beyer (University of Konstanz)
 12 February 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Sensing the translation: Language and medico-legal enactments of expertise in occupational diseases lawsuits in Turkey” by Zeynel Gul (John Hopkins University)

Discussant: Jovana Bogićević (University of Palermo)
26 February 2021 / 9.30-11.00 am CET
“Legal consciousness compared: the Case of Botswana” by Pnina Werbner (Keele University)
Discussant: Sophie Andreetta (Université de Liège)

26 March 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Vernacularizing bureaucracy and quantifying violence: The writing of Palestinians’ testimonies in Israeli human rights NGOs” by Omri Grinberg (Hebrew University of Jerusalem and University of Haifa)
Discussant: Sylvie Bodineau (York University)

9 April 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Kaleidoscope of truth: Legal fictions, real cases and controversial proof in the production of the Prevention of Atrocities Act in Rajasthan” by Sandhya I. Fuchs (LSE and University of Bern)
Discussant: Natasha Raheja (Cornell University)

23 April 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Indigenous water ontologies, plurilegal encounters and interlegal translation: some reflections from the field” by Lieselotte Viaene (Universidad Carlos III de Madrid)
Discussant: Andrea Ballestero (Rice University)

30 April 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Words, numbers, culture: Thinking with Sally Engle Merry at the Universal Periodic Review” by Jane Cowan (University of Sussex)
Discussant: Julie Billaud (Graduate Institute in Geneva)

7 May 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Authoritarian vernaculars of the Right to Truth: Exhuming mass graves in Rwanda and Burundi” by Astrid Jamar (Open University) and Laura Major (SOAS and University of Strathclyde)
Discussant: Gerhard Anders (University of Edinburgh)

 21 May 2021 / 2-3.30 pm CET
“Mediating mobility: Migration and brokerage at the borders of the State”
by Natasha Raheja (Cornell University)
Discussant: Elizabeth Challinor (Universidade NOVA de Lisboa)

 28 May 2021 / 9.30-11.00 am CET
“Book launch/discussion: The Subject of human rights (SUP 2020)” by Danielle Celermajer and Alex Lefebvre (University of Sidney)
Discussant: Agathe Mora (University of Sussex)

Read more about Sally Engle Merry

“In Memoriam: Sally Engle Merry” on Allegra lab:
https://allegralaboratory.net/in-memoriam-sally-engle-merry/

Sally Engle Merry’s page on NYU website: https://its.law.nyu.edu/facultyprofiles/index.cfm…

What Frames? What Geopolitics? Photographing Afghan Kyrgyz Migration Routes

Tobias Marschall
January, 2020

Following a photo exhibition on Afghan Kyrgyz migration routes staged at the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies in Geneva, this virtual exhibition ponders on problems of framing research for public view. It addresses the way aesthetic choices conflate cultural particularisms. It eventually aims to provide ways to conciliate an aesthetics of the place's and society's elusiveness with endangerment sensibilities (Vidal and Dias 2016) and salvage imperatives.

Endangerment Sensibilities

During the preparation of the exhibition's vernissage, I incidentally came across a photograph in Géo Magazine of two Afghan Kyrgyz women and a young girl surrounded by a few yacks on their summer pastures. On the photograph, a few sentences locate Afghan Kyrgyz women into a culturally specific aesthetic in explaining that they traditionally shift from red to white headdresses once married. The frame of the Magazine appeared to me as an opportune invite to ponder on the way the exhibition of my own photographs relates to common depictions of Afghan Kyrgyz and to a contested geopolitical imaginary that rests on the supposed existence of discrete ethnic groups.

Titled *The People Challenging the 21st Century,* the French special issue of Géo Magazine features a world panorama of indigenous and "remote" tribes. In the foreword, the chief editor highlights the global relevance of indigenous societies' particular challenges to the 21st century, mentioning extreme examples of societies refusing global exchanges and striving for autonomy, such as the Sentineli in the Bay of Bengal, India (Meyer 2019). Moving along the pages, the reader's attention is brought along spectacular landscapes and close up portraits of people in their everyday attires staging next to symbols of global exchanges (an ATM machine, a satellite dish, etc.). Next to the images, short texts continue to delve into problems generated by the further global integration of these supposedly remote or isolated societies, their discrete location being steadily indexed on a world map.

> *The gaze of international magazines has long since framed trials of Afghan Kyrgyz into the narrative trope of a small indigenous society stuck by the downplay of global forces on the "Roof of the World" (Anderson 2005, Callahan 2009, Finkel 2013, Leithead 2007).*

This trope, resumed less emphatically as cultural and economic adaptations to global transformations, continues to inform the narratives of not only internationally acclaimed documentaries but also of earlier monographs (Meunier 2013, Callahan 2013, Dor and Naumann 1978, Shahrani 2002). However, conceiving these groups' challenges through the lens of either endangerment or adaptation participates of a particular geopolitical imaginary predicated on the idea that globalization necessarily disrupts an assumedly harmonious congruence of place and people. The frame of this geopolitical imaginary bears shortcomings in that it presupposes territorially bounded ethnonational entities long debunked as sedentary metaphysics (Malkki 1999). It echoes a "'double bind' to which all anthropologists, and anthropology itself, are, by their very nature, prey: the 'purity' they crave is no more than a state in which all frames of comprehension, of interpretation and analysis, are lacking; once these are brought to bear, the mystery that drew the anthropologist towards his subject in the first place vanishes" (McCarthy 2015: 55-56).

> *While Afghan Kyrgyz face extreme political and environmental pressure on their livelihoods, a focus on endangerment through growing global integration poorly exhausts the realm of opportunities brought by new kinds of exchanges.*

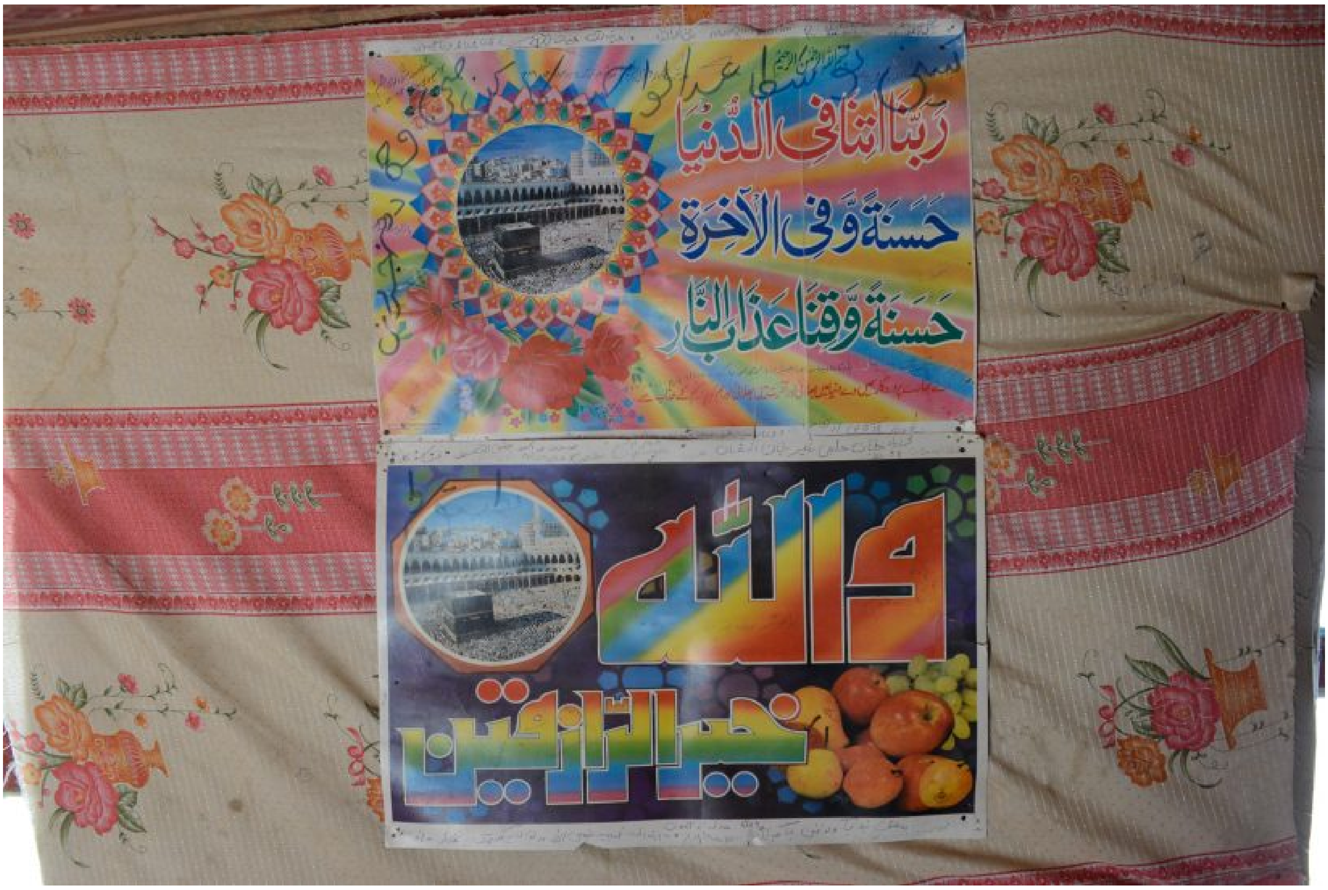
Their lasting presence in the inhospitable Afghan Pamirs speaks also for different dynamics such as when pastures, international borders, remote crossroads and the image itself of an endangered society are turned into valuable resources. Indeed, "in the endangerment regime, turned as it is toward preservation, irreversible loss and definitive forgetting are ultimate forms of negativity, anti-values par excellence" (Vidal and Dias 2016, 1). At the same time, Afghan Kyrgyz successive migrations fragment the supposedly homogenous ethnic group in various locations (currently Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Turkey).

Afghan Kyrgyz Migration Routes

Forcing Afghan Kyrgyz into conventional ethnic, environmental, existential and national categories would not hone their own expression of a nomadic ethos where outmigration is always conceived as a potentially alternative option. Although a significant part eventually settled in Turkey after a disastrous migration in the first months of the Soviet-Afghan war (many people lost their lives on their way to neighboring Pakistan), some decided to return to Afghanistan and remained to date in the Pamirs.

> *Since then, people stake on the 'edge' and precarious earnings of an industrious exploitation of the Afghan Pamirs as an ecological niche, a borderland and a remote crossroads.*

Resources arise mainly from their circulations and integration on many levels (such as pastoral markets, humanitarian and development interventions, tourism, global endangerment sensibilities of international organizations and the marginal gains that their ‘remote’ location enables). Intermediaries to these positions are many. Traders, humanitarians, development workers, tourists, journalists, anthropologists and researchers, far away parents, border guards, soldiers, fighters and commandants are all important actors roaming around and across the Pamirs. All contribute in their own way to insert the place into frictive and competing exchange realms whose transversal permeability is alternately affected by the ongoing war and conflicts.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Documentary across Boundaries

Given the field's heterogeneity, choices in the design of the exhibition were principally animated by this overarching and timely question: What photographs would detail the complexity and elusiveness of migration and climate change in the Afghan Pamirs in a way texts would not? Advice and feedback from magazine editors, professional photographers and the jury of competitions influenced the edition of images and contributed to elicit particularly striking landscapes and portraits.

The final selection of thirteen photographs favored a certain unity in the colors and tones of alternate landscapes, portraits and details such as hands serving tea or wrist watches. At the entrance of the exhibition, a short synopsis retraced Afghan Kyrgyz migration routes and the spatial configuration of the Afghan Pamirs on a map of the region. As such, the exhibition juxtaposed photographs and text along a geopolitical frame. Images narrated the specific and striking features of the Afghan Pamirs while the synopsis sketched the more complex dimensions and history of the place's circulations.

In this virtual exhibition, there is thus scope to underline that uncertainty, contestation and contamination are inherent to documentary practices (Balsom & Peleg 2016) and to stress the potential of photographs to address the surface and materiality of conceptual issues (Plattet 2002, Schielke 2010). Ariella Azoulay, in her formulation of a political ontology for photography, claims that "a photograph does not possess a single sovereign, stable point of view, and that what is visible in it – its actual referent – must be grounded no less than its interpretation" (Azoulay 2010, 10). Moving the exhibition online and in a different visual and textual frame consists in another experiment where yet unknown interpretations might arise from the website's different public and affordances.

About

The exhibition *On the Edge: Afghan Kyrgyz Migration in an Era of Climate Change* is displayed at the Graduate Institute's Salon Davis from September 17 to October 31 2019. It moved to the annual conference of the Swiss Anthropological Association (8-9.11.2019) and will eventually be displayed at La Galerie d'Anières in Geneva (08-16.01.2020).

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#events: Let’s Get Geographical!

Allegra
January, 2020

They say 'the early bird catches the worm'. Would you like to catch that worm? Or, perhaps, that worm isn't so enticing! How about a short course on decolonisation in anthropology or a conference on geo-ethnographic research?

The New Year is already looking up with all kinds of opportunities to advance your career and knowledge in anthropology. Maybe you've always wanted to travel off the beaten track to a Maltese island, or maybe you have something to say about the emphasis on positivity in post-reform China? Whatever you're feeling for the coming year, we're sure something below will appeal to you! So give yourself the 2020 you want and smash those learning goals!

Merry Christmas to you all and a very Happy New Year!

As always, if you would like your event to feature in our next events list or if you wish to write a short report, don't hesitate to get in touch with our events admin, Kanchi, at events@allegralaboratory.net or through any one of our social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram or Twitter.

Short course: "Decolonising Anthropology: Why and How it matters"
Goldsmiths University
13 Jan 2020, 18:30 – 23 Mar 2020

Through the study of anthropology and it's methods, this course will focus on ways of thinking about anthropological issues from multiple perspectives, including through films, documentaries, literature, and art. You will revisit traditional discussions of anthropology, such as the human-nature relationship, subject-object divides, and gift economies, and reflect on indigenous knowledge systems and alternative ways of knowing.
The course is based on materials from anti-colonial research methods, intersectional feminist theory, critical race theory, and indigenous research perspectives to social movements, and theory from settler-colonial contexts and anti-racist movements. [more]

Call for Papers: "Anthropology and Geography: Dialogues Past, Present and Future Conference"
The British Museum, Clore Centre, SOAS, Senate House and Royal Geographical Society
4 – 7 June 2020

This panel focuses on the potential and limitations of geo-ethnographic research in the Indian Ocean region. You will be able to explore geographers' and anthropologists' methodological use of (visual) research tools like photography or mapping to engage with concepts like mobility, belonging, or identity.[more]

Deadline for application: 8 January 2020

Summer School: Off the Beaten Track Field School for Cultural Anthropology and Humanities
Gozo, Malta
June 5 – June 24 | July 2 – July 21 | July 29 – August 17 2020

The Off the Beaten Track summer field school is held annually on the islet of Gozo, one of the three inhabited islands of the Maltese Archipelago in the heart of the Mediterranean. The program offers both budding anthropologists and more advanced scholars, a valuable opportunity to acquire 'in the field' experience n an island with 7,000 years of history. The islands present a balance of past and present: rural Mediterranean traditions intersect with foreign influence in small fishing villages. At the crossroads of maritime routes between Europe, Africa and Asia, Malta has always been strategically important, and thus many influences have contributed to the Maltese and Gozitan culture. This can be seen for example in the Maltese language – a fusion of Arabic, Italian and other languages.[more]

Deadline for Scholarship calls: 5 January 2020

Call for Papers: Locating Negative Affects in China's Post-Reform Era: Public Culture, Stranger Sociability, Political Potentials
Conference of the European Association for Chinese Studies, University of Leipzig, Germany
25-29 August 2020

UNIVERSITÄT LEIPZIG

This panel aims to bring together scholars from different disciplinary horizons to reflect on the expression of negative affects and emotions in everyday life and public culture in post-reform China. You will have the opportunity to explore the negative affects in a political and social context marked by an emphases on positivity, and whether there any spaces left for negativity to be expressed and acted upon in the overwhelmingly positive public sphere that is dominant in China.

If you are interested, please send an abstract to Lisa Richaud by **15 December 2019.**

Winter School: Maynooth University Ethnography Winter School
Maynooth University, Iontas Building
13 – 17 January 2020, 10:00 – 17:00

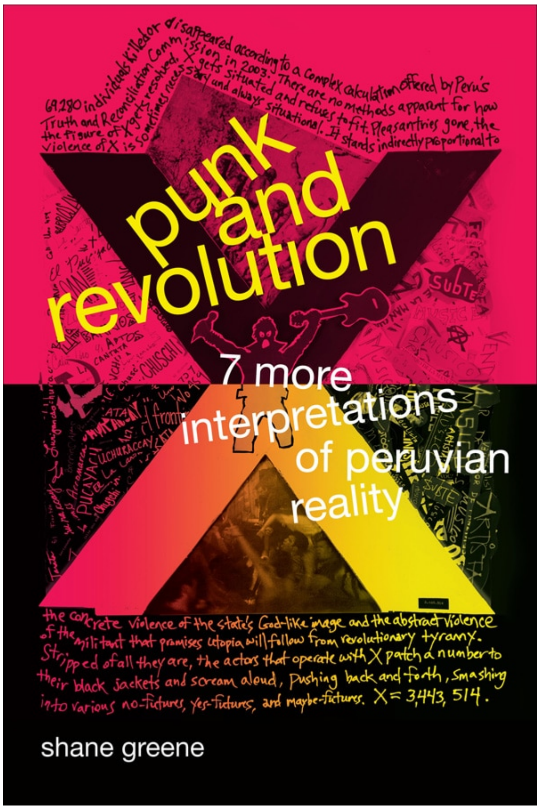
This comprehensive introduction to ethnography covers various different themes such as culture and difference, politics of knowledge, research ethics and ethnographic engagement. This course provides anthropologists and ethnographers alike, whether students planning proposals or professionals returning to academia, a chance to produce work through the workshop style of the school. The course also features two guests; Professor Pinney who is well known for his contributions to visual anthropology and the ethnographic analysis of images in sociocultural life, and Dr. Shankland from the RAI who will discuss contemporary ethnographic research.

Contact Dr. Thomas Strong by **20 December 2019** to enrol on the course!

Feature image (cropped) by wiredforlego (Flickr, CC BY-NC 2.0)

#Review: Punk and Revolution

Carolin Hirsch
January, 2020



In [*Punk and revolution: Seven more interpretations of Peruvian reality*](), Shane Greene locates the distinctive elements of Peruvian punk in the context of the political and urban environment of the 1980s and early 1990s. This time, which Greene refers to as "the bloodiest period since independence from Spain" (1) is shaped by the Communist Party of Peru, also known as the Shining Path, and is dominated by migration, race and class conflicts. He points to the autonomous and revolutionary character of the Peruvian punk, which is used for political resistance through music and art. Instead of trying to define "punk," Greene examines how the Peruvian punk emerged in its particular form. Thereby he dislocates punk from its familiar place "in the history of Anglo popular music forms and the Euro-American avant-garde"(5) and reflects on punk and its meaning in this particular historical moment.

Although the global Punk movement is often seen as uniform, a closer look at the origins and musical characteristics reveals the unique nature of every punk scene. Greene's study of the Peruvian punk scene is illustrative of this. Greene's work resonates with my ethnographic research with a Punk collective in Yangon, in which I examine the processes of "becoming" among activists amidst Myanmar's political and social changes.

> *While following different activist projects that are led by this punk collective, I observed how their punk is shaped by Myanmar's social and political issues.*

Through the use of lyrics, visual artworks, interviews and fieldnotes Greene offers an archival project that is divided into seven interpretations. In the first chapter, interpretation #1, Greene states that punk in itself cannot be defined, but what punk is striving to achieve can be described. The *rock subterráneo*, where the underground punk rock scene of Lima is located, was using different elements like homemade technology out of second-hand electronic devices and samples from the audio of propaganda to channel their creativity into their music as a way of revolution. With the case study of *Narcosis*, one of the first Lima punk bands, and its first record *Primera Dosis*, the author's interpretation takes the reader through the process of production in the DIY (Do It Yourself – a basic punk principle) spirit. *Primera Dosis* is a *Marquetta* (18), a music cassette that already is a substitution. This stands in opposition to vinyl, which was not accessible for the *rock subterráneo*. Here Greene opens up a contrast between Punk in the Global South and Punk in the Global North. The North was listening mainly to vinyl, the South mainly to cassettes. The *Marquetta* was produced as music cassettes which were essentially already duplicates, replicating the copy of a copy of a copy. The author is tracing some influences from the Global North punk that already came to Lima as copies of copies.

> *At this point the question came to my mind – "when can a copy still be called a copy and not something new?"*

It has started to emerge in my research on punk in Myanmar that not enough consideration has been afforded to this dichotomy between at what stage mimicry becomes originality. Drawing on Greene's theory, this binary misunderstands the origins of the individual punk scenes and styles.

Bringing in Marxist theory about overproduction, Greene's ethnography also illustrates how the music of the *rock subterráneo* is used in opposition; for underproduction as a revolutionary tool. This interpretative approach concludes in the second reading, when Greene states that punk aims to *underfuck the system* (48).

He moves on to investigate in-depth how this scene was divided, along with gender, race, class and spatial divisions. The ethnography brings punk rock shows from the 1980s back to life. Within these shows, the author reconstructs the conflicts with the surrounding environment outside and the conflicts within the underground scene.

Greene goes on to dig deeper into the Punk scene and reveals strong and deep divisions which split the *rock subterráneo* into two camps. On the one side are the *pituco*-punks and on the other side the *cholo*-punks (56). These terms refer to antagonisms coming from race, class and spatial divisions among the members of the underground scene. To explain the pituco-cholo-conflict to the reader Greene takes it back to historical developments, which reveal the class, race and spatial origins of the conflict. Although there is already a strong division between two camps, a gender aspect adds dimension in interpretation #4. The Peruvian punk scene was male-dominated and rife with gender struggles. Within the context of everyday, grappling with gender became a secondary problem to the *real* problems related to class and race politics that the members of the scene rebelled against.

As an example, Greene introduces the reader to *Maria T-Ta*. *Maria T-Ta*, a female Punk artist, used *feminist slapstick* (p. 98) in her songs and performances, proclaiming body and sex-positivity. Her attempts to creatively represent the issues that drove her engagement in the scene were met with strong resistance by the male scene members. In the case study of *Maria T-Ta*, the author also makes clear how much state repression and police violence the scene members had to face.

> *Maria T-Ta, as an outspoken and visible female punk, had to deal with issues of repression and violence inside and outside the scene.*

Greene closes the circle by adding a chapter, where he shifts into the past decade, starting from 2010. There Greene explores the reunion concerts of the 1980s punk bands and subsequent nostalgia. The last two interpretations of the ethnography consist of fieldnotes, an art project, and a philosophical *drunken dialogue* about punk’s constant death, rebirth, and metamorphosis.

Starting as early as the third line of the introduction chapter with "anyone dumb enough to think" (1), Greene's vocabulary is interspersed with unconventional language for academic publications. There is no hesitation in using the word *fuck* in various contexts to make points clear and add another dimension to the interpretation. The content of the book focuses on specific terms and their usage, on symbolisms and the underproduction of music and art as revolutionary tools.

Whether intended or not, the chapter about punk's gender dimension in the Peruvian context is the centerpiece of the book. The chapter unites music and art as revolutionary tools while both are common targets of repression and violence by fellow scene members as well as state actors such as the police. This essay unites the single elements of the ethnography and reveals a dimension where revolution and repression collide, and where the scene mirrors the political and social environment they rebel against.

Punk and revolution is the academic part of a series of publications that reflect a part of the history of Peruvian punk. In addition, readers can access related artworks to the book on Peruvian punk by Greene and a collection of punk rock music that is also discussed in the ethnography via www.punkandrevolution.com. This features an ethnography including a soundtrack which was already composed in the 1980s.

Greene, Shane (2016). *Punk and Revolution. Seven more Interpretations of Peruvian reality*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

All photographs by Ludvine Paques

#MDGCOMICS: MZUNGUS IN DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNMENTS! #10

Omar Bah
January, 2020

In Episode 10, Going Native, Omar grasps the true meaning of kizunguzungu: but is the dizziness coming from denying local researchers authorship, or from open relationships? (Also, in which MDGs team thanks the amazing people who helped with this project).

Podcasting for Anthropologists: Ethical and Technical Considerations

Heid Jerstadt
January, 2020

Are you an anthropologist considering podcasting? Then this post is for you

Sound is widely accessible, it conveys nuances of emotion, atmosphere and tensions in ways that are onerous with text, and currently podcasts are fairly democratic as a medium – i.e. free to self-publish for anyone with access to a recording device and the internet.

There are plenty of resources online (for instance [CEU Podcasts]) and nothing like learning by doing as long as you have the technical and ethical principles in hand. I will cover some of the basics here.

Ethical

When planning a podcast there are a couple of press ethics issues to be aware of. Product placement and other 'in-text' advertising will undermine the trust of your listeners in your content, regardless of the regulations in your country. Some people monetise podcasts, in which case clearly demarcated adverts in a different voice are okay, although tedious for your listeners. Also, be careful not to say negative things about other people, whether colleagues or research participants, podcasts which may go on radio must pass the ethical standards of broadcast media, and negative statements about specific people (or groups, but I shouldn't need to mention that to anthropologists) are not ok, unless the specific people get the chance to respond. If your podcast is in an interview format you as the presenter must rein in your guest or make a note about editing out inappropriate content (e.g. 'My students are so stupid' or 'x department chair accepted money to hire y'). Podcasting is in a space between traditional broadcast media and social media, and much more of a public statement than a private conversation.

If you are using material from fieldwork in your podcast then anonymity may be an issue. Not including a name is NOT enough to anonymise a person whose voice is being recorded. Even if it is in a rare language, or the people you work with are not online, the internet is global, and even without AI voice recognition, a human being can recognise a voice with a high level of precision, and every government/intelligence service is online. So any direct interview excerpts need a different level of consent to other research material. Alternatively there are two main options: distorting the voice in an editing programme (but you need to know what you are doing so that it cannot be easily reversed) or using another voice to record the quote. Any qualms you may have about using a narrative voice in

Russian when the quote was Uyghur is between you and your ethnographic conscience. All I would say is consider your audience.

As always when it comes to ethics, this is not a comprehensive overview, just a few potential pitfalls to be aware of.

Technical

To make a podcast you do need a bit of equipment, but it is a low threshold, and many anthropologists have sound recording equipment already. If your recorder is of the quality of a zoom H1 or above (with a wind shield – the fluffy black cover for the microphone part), then it can record at broadcastable quality. The volume ought to be between -12 and -24 dB (as seen on the screen of the recorder), around -16 is good. A new sound recorder shouldn't cost much more than 100 euros (I don't know what prices are like outside of Europe – apparently they are more expensive in Brazil? If so I guess be in Sao Paulo and get the department to pay for it?) and should last a long time. Go for rechargeable batteries.

Unlike with research recordings, the sound environment matters in a podcast. Dogs barking, predators howling, the crackle of the fire (yes, I did village fieldwork), are atmospheric – the neighbours quarrelling perhaps less so (and tricky consent-wise). Any even sound such as a fridge or a motorway can be removed in editing, but a rule of thumb is to always do what you can to minimise the need to edit. Sounds such as rustling paper or a tapping pen and banging on a table can be really frustrating to edit out of a sound file without losing the content. So make sure to listen for these sounds – and always use headphones! It can be just ear buds, but you really need to know if the battery is dead, the SD card full or some other unexpected factor meaning you lose the recording or the sound is unusable.

Once you've got your brilliant material recorded, Audacity is a free editing programme available on all operating systems. The resources linked to above are helpful on editing in Audacity. You can spend your life editing sound, so I'd advise spending time on prep so as to minimise the need to edit.

You can use your own voice for the intro (remember to include your name, the name of the podcast and important overview information at the start and end), and narration. A podcast is not like field notes, you are telling a story. The story can be an ethnographic vignette, as long as it has clear narrative structure or at least a heavy dose of atmosphere and some conflict. Remember, you can hear emotion in a voice, and this works several ways – your audience can hear if you are sad, or having a bad day. Somewhere I have a minidisc with material from after my class had just visited Auschwitz when we were 16, and you can hear strong emotions in the voices of the classmates I was interviewing. However, make the bad stuff interesting, through humour, a narrative structure, conflict, (described) images or a mystery which you reveal the solution to towards the end of the program.

In audio it is not possible for someone to scan and skip forwards, so you must keep an even quality of content. Podcasts are typically 20-40 minutes long, but could easily be shorter than that. If you have 10 minutes of great material perhaps all you need is a little intro and outro to bracket it and it's ready to go. If you want to be really fancy you can can make a jingle, but watch out for copyrighted music – use sounds or music from freesound.org and check the license.

A podcast or series of programmes can go online once you have it ready, if you fulfil the requirements of iTunes it will be possible to spread it via the RSS link of where you have it (for instance on your or your institutional website) to Podtail, Podbean, Player.fm etc etc. Watch out for Spotify, they appear to be moving towards closed ownership of podcasts, which are not openly available on other apps and sites. You can also consider broadcasting them on a local radio station, either at your fieldsite or near your institution as another way to disseminate the content.

As with any medium, listening to others doing it is a good way to learn how to do it well. A few examples of high quality content are the Mothers of Invention podcast (about climate change), and Invisibilia (made by NPR, with a narrative voice and quotes from interviews). These are resource-intensive productions but helpful for inspiration as to how things can be done.

You may find that voice is more satisfying than the written word – it is consumed differently as well – and there is an ease to talking which I find feels less like work But it's not for everyone.

If you come across a brilliant feminist podcast, or just a cool podcast made by someone who isn't a cis man, wherever you are in the world, please do send the tip along to me at redaktor@radiorakel.no

Have fun!

Featured image by Sunyu Kim (courtesy of Unsplash.com).

Larissa's Story: Behind the Migration Crisis Headlines

Deniz Daser
January, 2020

In late September, 2019, the current US presidential administration struck several unprecedented deals with the Northern Triangle governments of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador to return asylum seekers who transited through those countries on their way to the U.S. At the same time, the drug trafficking trial of Juan Antonio Hernández, brother of Honduran president, Juan Orlando Hernández, in New York has revealed how drug traffickers attempted to funnel money to US ally Hernández's election campaign in exchange for protection for their trade. Amidst these larger, internationally linked political forces, desperate asylum seekers from Central America inside an El Paso, Texas immigration courtroom plead not to be sent back to Mexico. The illicit economies of drugs, arms, and human smuggling cross borders in the region stretching from Honduras to the U.S. and reproduce the dangerous conditions that individuals find themselves trapped under. Migrants make their way northward within what is a transnational continuum of insecurity, with the most vulnerable – women and children – suffering the most. And it's only getting worse.

For several years now, immigration-related headlines from US newspapers have painted an increasingly grim picture of the (mostly) Central Americans seeking asylum in the United States. Harrowing photos and first-person accounts also characterize other immigration-related catastrophes: such individuals currently being held in detention centers, ICE[1] raids throughout the country that have accelerated over the past year, the family separation policy, and the ongoing "loss" of unaccompanied migrant minors by the US government. These developments highlight a worsening humanitarian crisis that, according to Amnesty International, has "manifestly violated both US and international law, and appeared to be aimed at the full dismantling of the US asylum system."

Yet, as conditions at the border deteriorate for individuals fleeing violence, economic deprivation, a worsening climate, and political corruption often exacerbated by US intervention in their home countries in Central America, relief-seeking migrants continue to trek northward over the well-trodden paths of earlier individuals who similarly faced an increasingly securitized and deadly border and further vulnerability within the US. Past policy choices have arguably contributed to the speed and ease with which the current presidential administration has implemented cruel and draconian immigration policies. Yet, as the following story illustrates how the possibilities for refuge are growing ever smaller, with women in particular suffering the effects.

"I arrived May 5, 2006." [*"Llegué a 5 de mayo 2006."*] Similar to many of the Central American migrants I interviewed while conducting anthropological fieldwork in New Orleans in 2013-2014, Larissa[2] remembered the precise date of her entry to the United States. She was fleeing Honduras and, like many fellow woman migrants from the region, was escaping domestic abuse and fears for her safety in urban Tegucigalpa. According to the United Nations, 22 percent of Honduran women experience "physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence" once in their lives. As Larissa told me once, in Spanish: "No, in my country they kill you. And they don't pay for it there." Her voice cracked as she described leaving her then-nine-year old son Christopher with her mother and sister when she left Honduras in 2006. The story of Larissa echoes the accounts of other migrants I spoke with who also came from Central America to the U.S.: an arduous journey, the guidance of a coyote, hiding from *La Migra*, or Border Patrol, and the final crossing of the Rio Grande. Not knowing how to swim, Larissa relied on a fellow female migrant to help her wade through and then cross the river.

Larissa's account highlights how dangerous conditions do not end upon setting out from Honduras. Instead, conditions of insecurity begin at home, continue throughout the journey, and follow into eventual settlement in the U.S., often as an undocumented migrant. Compared to others, Larissa was relatively fortunate in how a traumatic experience allowed her to undergo a path to legalization. She gained residency in the U.S. in the late 2010s and was able to bring her son Christopher to join her in 2009 through the U-Visa, a nonimmigrant status created under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act and the Battered Immigrant Women's Protection Act. As part of this act, promoted and passed under the Clinton Administration in 2000, migrants are expected to testify and aid the US government in prosecuting crimes—including domestic abuse in the U.S.—and in turn are protected from deportation. Larissa's journey to legal US resident has been arduous and only possible because of measures meant to protect her as a domestic abuse survivor in the U.S., measures that the current administration is seeking to abolish.

Over the past few decades, the demographics of migrants coming over the US-Mexican border have become more Central American: the percentage of individuals from the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador crossing the border increased from only two per cent in 2000 to 50 percent in 2014. Along with children, adult women are amongst the most vulnerable of this group. A UNHCR report from 2015 highlights how 60 percent of female Central American migrants reported attacks, rape, and violent threats in their home countries, sometimes from the police themselves. Under policies spearheaded in June 2018, however, the US federal government has declared that domestic abuse and violence stemming from gang activity are no longer legitimate grounds for asylum applications. Similarly, asylum applications from migrants at the U.S.'s southern border have nearly ground to a halt in the past several months. As of December, 2018, rates for successful asylum applications were at the lowest in twenty years. While an August 2, 2019 federal court ruling struck down the current administration's near complete asylum ban on the southern border, the struggle over immigration policy continues unabated.

Much of the groundwork laid for current immigration policies began with the George W. Bush administration's post-9/11 expansion of the US deportation regime. Until the 1990s, deportations from the U.S. had held steady at no more than 50,000 annually for several decades. After growing anti-immigrant sentiment and 1996 legislation, that number rose to 200,000 per year in the years preceding 2001. The events of 9/11 in 2001 spurred a further increase in deportations, stricter border controls, the creation of a securitized federal bureaucracy (the Department of Homeland Security), and, eventually, the public mainstreaming of a new normal in cracking down on "illegal immigration." This despite the fact that the US economy depends heavily on the low-wage labor of undocumented migrants; the U.S. has long demanded yet criminalized its cheap labor pool.

Following upon the hardline policies enacted by Bush, President Obama's record from 2009 on was mixed. Under his administration, deportations rose to 400,000 in 2009 and decreased to nearly 350,000 deportations in 2016. In offering increased deportations in proposed exchange for partisan support for a large-scale immigration reform process that failed in Congress, immigrant rights advocates assigned Obama the moniker of the Deporter-in-Chief, though in the second half of his presidency deportations decreased and programs like DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) implemented some immigration relief. Today, under the forty-fifth president, deportations stand at slightly more than 200,000 per year, a decline due not so much to a reduced effort at deportation as to fewer individuals crossing the border in the first place. The number of migrants entering the country who were undocumented fell from 32% in 2007 to 20% in 2016. Contrary to public panic over a "surge at the border," the number of unauthorized migrants living in the US has declined, from 12.2 million in 2007 to 10.7 million in 2016.

And while the U-visa that Larissa used during the period of Obama's presidency still exists, policies in that realm have changed too: the Justice Department is now waiving the discretionary powers judges had previously exercised to allow petitioners to stay and work legally while their U-Visa applications were under review, making it a much riskier strategy and one that may drive women migrants back to their abusers. Local law enforcement has already noticed a decreased reporting of domestic violence and individuals willing to work with them on prosecutions. Yet, Larissa's story presents a different dimension to the contemporary Central American migrant presented in many news articles: one of triumph and measured hope. During my fieldwork in New Orleans, I saw how Larissa, along with other Central American migrants, contributed to rebuilding the city after Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc in 2005 and settled as residents, though often with undocumented status.

As conditions worsen in Central America, individuals continue to find the risk of migrating worth it. Women have been and continue to be particularly vulnerable all along the northward journey and are at risk of physical and sexual abuse. Studies show that roughly 60-80 percent of women migrants from Central America experience some form of sexual assault on their journeys. There have been thousands of complaints of abuse while in ICE custody, including women who say they were raped or blocked from reproductive services including abortion for minors. "There is a lot of violence in men towards women," Larissa told me. "And women, we remain silent, sometimes out of fear, or sometimes because we are involved in a system from which we cannot find a way out."

Larissa counted herself lucky for not encountering abuse along her own journey to the United States. After stopping in Houston for three days to rest and recover from a fever, chronic itching, and foot sores she had acquired during her long migration, she arrived in New Orleans roughly a year after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. By then in her early forties, Larissa quickly found work rebuilding the devastated city. Within two months of arriving in New Orleans, she had learned how to sand and paint. She told me in Spanish how she had worked "from seven in the morning to ten to eleven at night." She sent everything she could to her family and son in Honduras. "I made the sacrifice … I didn't care if I was tired or anything."

Larissa eventually built her own house in New Orleans in 2014-2015, with the help of volunteers and employees of an organization assisting low-income individuals to become homeowners. I was volunteering for them too at that time. Larissa showed me how to carefully paint the corners where the walls meet the ceiling, and shook her head amusedly at my terrible painting skills. My 15 months of fieldwork in New Orleans revealed the role Hondurans like Larissa, along with other Latinx migrants, played in rebuilding and reshaping the post-Katrina city. Since 2005, New Orleans has emerged as a hub of Central American migration. As of 2017, migrants from Central America constituted one-third of the New Orleans metro area's Latinx community in contrast to nine percent of the broader US Latinx population. Many of these individuals fled conflict and economic deprivation to find work in the rebuilding of New Orleans.

Larissa stayed in the building trades as a painter, working with a Honduran subcontractor on houses throughout the city. Her sacrifices, struggles, and successes bear witness to the possibilities of human survival and achievement that policies such as the U-Visa allow. When I visited Larissa again in 2016, we sat together in her then-finished house, adorned with new appliances and furniture. As we sipped Sprites, she told me she had repainted the entire house herself after she moved in because she was not satisfied with the work of the organization’s volunteers. “Like me?” I asked. She laughed in agreement. She showed me photos of her son Christopher’s high school graduation, and gave me updates on his achievements in college.

As the door to potential safe haven for migrants like Larissa closes ever more tightly in the U.S., *de facto* refugees will continue to make the dangerous journey northward in their bid to find a way out, regardless of the risks. In just the period November 2018-September 2019 alone, over 250,000 Hondurans crossed the US-Mexico border. And women will continue to face particular dangers within these concentric circles of insecurity. The policy choices of presidential administrations matter profoundly for these migrants. Those policies affect structural conditions in their Central American homelands as well as individual fates along the migratory trek to potential settlement—or detention—in the United States.

[1] ICE refers to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the federal law enforcement agency tasked with enforcing immigration and customs law and falling under the purview of the Department of Homeland Security.

[2] Larissa’s name and other personal details have been changed to protect her identity and privacy.

Featured Image by Engin_Akyurt (Courtesy of Pixabay)

#MDGComics: Mzungus in Development and Governments! #9

Omar Bah
January, 2020

In Section 9 Omar teaches Greta the amount of adjectives required to break government gatekeeping – while Naga defends the precious Ministry data from short term consultants in spite of the many beers. Meanwhile, the cats discuss preliminary findings on the new Mzungus' resilience level: as expected, not very high.

#MDGComics: Mzungus in Development and Governments! #8

Omar Bah
January, 2020

In Section 8, Linguistic Interpretation (or lost in MDGs translation), the role of language is explored. Will Omar understand Mzungus better if he improves his fluency in Acronymia? How do you strengthen donors' trust through the use of random English phrases? What should Greta answer at a flight pub-quiz on African languages? But most of all, why aren't double meanings of Acronymia vocabulary ever checked?