#Review: Shooting a Revolution

Ieva Zakareviciute
October, 2019

Shooting a Revolution is a smart polyseme that Donatella Della Ratta uses to describe the grim reality of Syria: one shoots to kill and one shoots to film. The two are incredibly intertwined, and, at war, all sides are guilty of both.

Della Ratta's metaphor extends further than a mere binary wordplay — there are many ways of filming, just as there are many ways of killing.

Shooting to kill, while becoming a morbid everydayness in Syria, plays multiple roles and purposes: rebels shoot to spark a revolution, while regime shoots to

quash it. Multiple parties shoot to torture and terrorise. We read reports about ISIS newcomers shooting civilians as part of their initiation processes. Finally, many in Syria shoot in order to survive – as their only strategy to outwait the war.

In her book, Della Ratta shows how shooting to film has also picked up multiple roles, often curiously mirroring those of shooting to kill. Filming, to broadcast their discontent with the regime was one of the main means of resistance used by protesters. It also served as a tool to connect with other protesters across different sections and areas of the country. Meanwhile, the Syrian regime used filming to appease society and dissuade people from joining the uprising. Multiple fighter groups film torture and pose with mutilated bodies to inspire and/or horrify. Finally, many film to document atrocities, hoping that visual material can later be used to deliver justice.

Della Ratta thoroughly analyses all these different roles images play in Syria's political life. She shows how they merge and transform into one another. Despite the book's primary focus on war and revolutionary imagery, *Shooting a Revolution* is also more broadly a book about visual culture in contemporary age — as many discussed tendencies manifest globally. Della Ratta documents the political strategies and objectives of a society that is fully enmeshed in the transformative experience of political violence while having a full realisation of what importance the visual culture holds and is trying hard to make the best of it. She writes a story of how that visual culture is reinvented in order to be adjusted to new political contexts. How it keeps picking up new roles and missions and keeps constantly failing at them.

The first part of Della Ratta's book focuses on the practice of "enlightenment"*(tanwir)* that began in the early 1960s, together with the introduction of television in Syria, and to a certain extent lasts till this day (pp. 15-35). *Tanwir* was co-produced by the Syrian state apparatus and cultural producers and promoted seemingly reformist ideals that aimed at educating Syrian society through TV series. On the one hand, *tanwir* was conceived to educate society on personal and civic freedoms and to heal it from its presumed

backwardness. On the other hand, it was meant to shield the regime's political and social reforms and contain society's dissatisfaction.

Della Ratta's ethnography not only analyses how tanwir was produced, but also how shortly after the uprising began it ultimately failed at its major mission – to appease society.

The core of *tanwir's* success in its early days was what Della Ratta calls 'whisper strategy'— a form of soft communication, through which decisions are made and things are agreed upon. It is crucial to all parties involved as no one can claim ownership or control over it, therefore absolving all sides from responsibility. It is also a good illustration of Syria's regime system as a whole, and as to why so many, even when the regime committed atrocities became well-known, were so reluctant to assign guilt to Bashar al-Assad. Not only in the West, where he moonlights as the most "western" of all Arab leaders, but also inside Syria. Della Ratta demonstrates how, for a long time, al-Assad not only managed to hold a firm grip on power but also kept a blameless reputation across wide sections of society (pp. 58 -68). That was in large part due to the curious combination of *tanwir,* which always portrayed the president as a benevolent figure liberating Syrian society from its darkness, and 'whisper strategy', which put countless numbers of regime agents between the presidency and any kind of act-taken, and thus, absolving him from direct responsibility.

Della Ratta shows how the regime eventually failed at appeasing crowds through TV production. The main culprit of its failure this time around was the same multilayered power structure that kept Bashar al-Assad guilt-proof for so many years. However, after the beginning of the uprising, the regime's indecisiveness and clashing agendas within it failed to establish a discourse that could have had a democratising and mitigating effect. Although Della Ratta documents attempts, that were made. Instead, the regime quickly shifted towards "security and stability" rhetoric over reformism and started designating "terrorist" labels to all those fighting and protesting (pp. 68-79).

Curiously activists were fast to see through the regime's new PR attempts and quickly started to appropriate and subvert its messaging.

In the second part of the book, Della Ratta looks at various acts of defiance, which she calls 'creative insurgency' (pp. 79-99). The most salient early revolutionary acts consisted of attempts at 'culture jamming' (DeLaure and Fink, 2017), where protesters appropriated and remediated regime-backed visual campaigns while imposing their own defiant and ironic meanings on them. Be it geeks posting ironic memes on social media, or rebel fighters posing for a photo-shoot at a famous TV series set in the area they have newly captured — everyone was aware of the power of symbolic language. The problem is — symbols easily shift hands.

However, while Della Ratta acknowledges the 'revolutionary resilience' encoded in these acts of creative insurgency, she also gives a very sobering reading of the larger effect they had on the revolution. She is critical of the discourse on what she calls the 'quasi-magical powers' of networked technologies and their ability to enable democracy. She rather claims that because of the internet's infrastructure most attempts at online protest remained 'mere contributions,' 'means to register opinions' and failed to foster any meaningful conversation (pp. 86-89).

She remains equally cautious about the activists' videos from protests and battlefield. She calls such visual content 'networked images' and deems that their ultimate quality is that they no longer exist as 'evidence-based' images — generated to document and prove crimes and human rights violations. They have rather become merely non-stop sharing material floating across the internet having neither a particular receiver nor significant impact. It is precisely their circulation, and not the ability to represent conflict in any way, that creates value to the 'networked images.' The value that, now, mainly serves the monetary interests of the networked platforms, since the activists who uploaded them essentially mostly lost control of their dissemination (pp. 149-179).

Donatella Della Ratta

VISUAL MEDIA
AND WARFARE
IN SYRIA

Shooting a Revolution
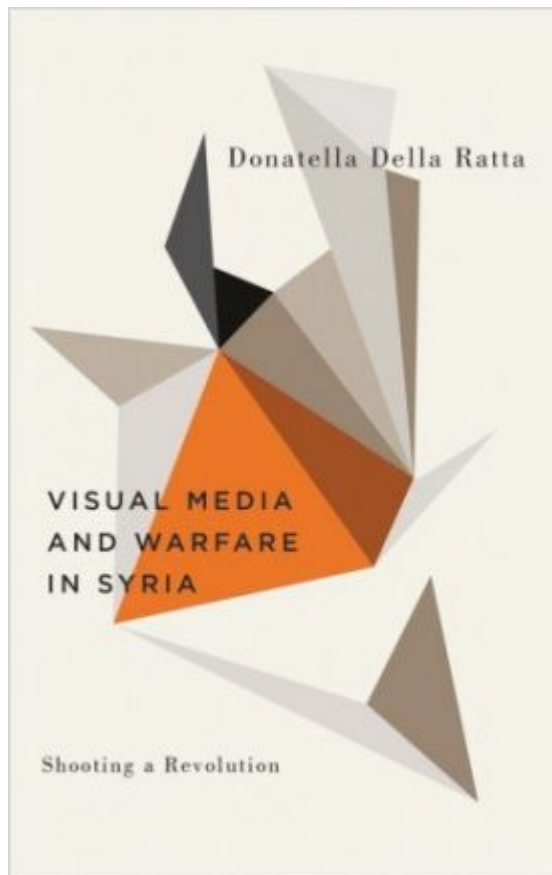
Yet, according to Della Ratta, it is these videos where a lot of revolutionary action was taking place. On the one hand, they served as a unifying virtual gathering place for the protests, which have scattered all across the country. Videos united geographically and religiously divided country by broadcasting shared political goals. What is more, they provided a sense of solidarity, since the protesters were filmed echoing lines and chants from the past protests. On the other hand, the video, and the camera that has filmed it, essentially became a tool of resistance and a weapon in this mediatized conflict. Filming themselves and others protesting and sometimes even dying, as Della Ratta puts it, "is probably the most significant achievement of the Syrian protester" (140), as it is not only a mean to register their political dissent but also a way to (re)gain one's agency in regime's highly controlled environment.

When commenting on the Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation that triggered the Tunisian Revolution, Didier Fassin stated, that his body has simultaneously become "the site of the violence exerted by [...] military dictatorship and the ultimate resistance of the individual, which demonstrates how individual subjectivity can overcome political subjection" (Fassin, 2011). In Della Ratta's study that site is the video. Although failing to live up to its revolutionary missions, videos have given protesters an opportunity to self-document their own history and reclaim agency of their political dissent to crystalize "the self in the historical document"(2).

DeLaure, Marilyn and Fink, Moritz. 2017 . *Culture Jamming. Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance* (New York, New York University Press.

Fassin, Didier. 2011. "The Trace: Violence, Truth, and the Politics of the Body", keynote at the 23rd Social Research conference, The New School of Social Research, New York, February 10, 2011.

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Featured image by ArtTower (Courtesy of Pixabay)

#MDGComics: Mzungus in Development and Governments! #7

Omar Bah
October, 2019
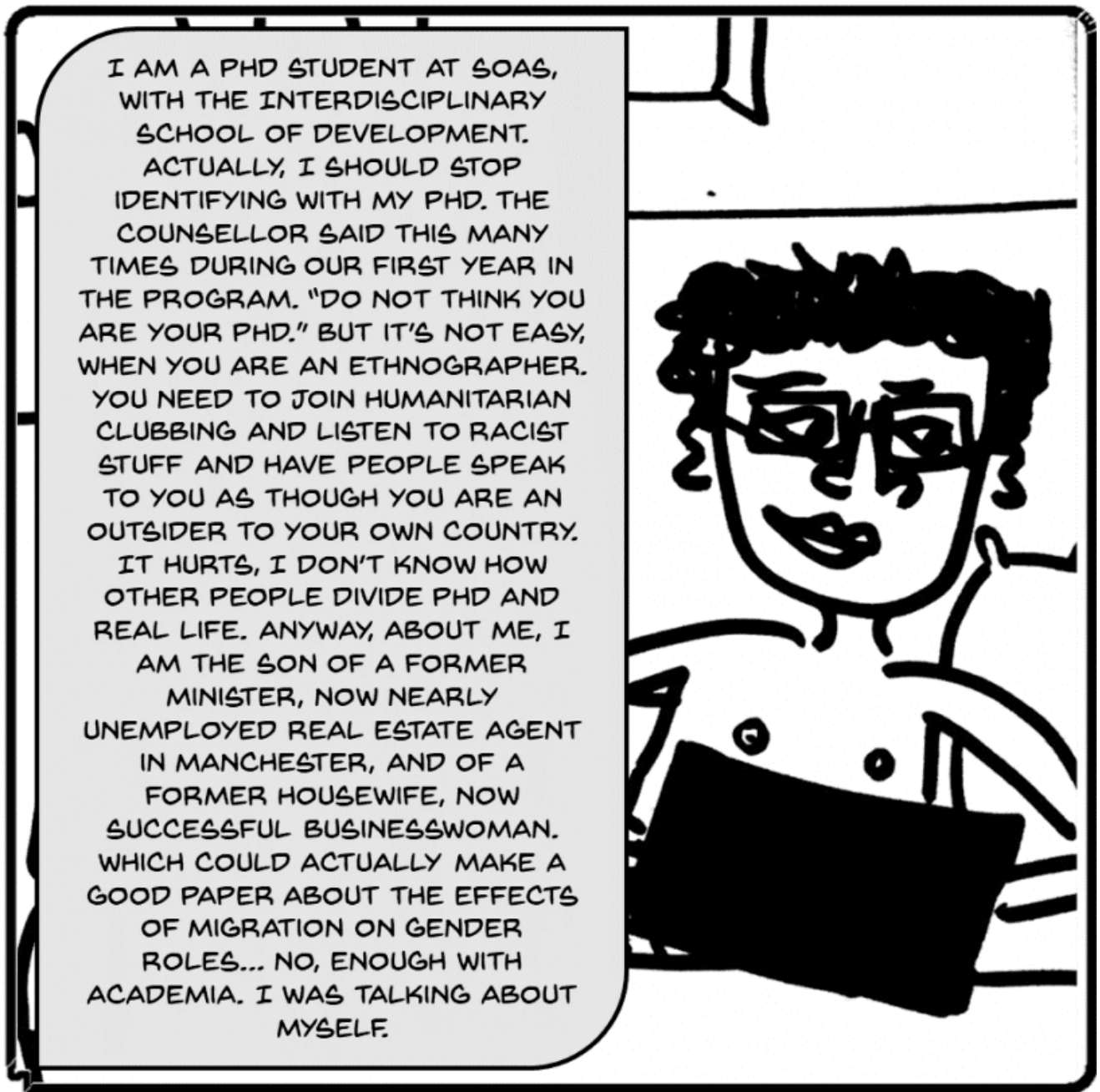
In [Section 7](#) Omar is in search of his own existential place within the research: definitely not inside the Cheraton, maybe far from Mzungus for a while... a holiday from Wakanda in rural England?

Welcome to #MDGcomics: Mzungus in Development and Governments!

Omar Bah
October, 2019

Welcome to #MDGcomics: Mzungus in Development and Governments! A Phd turned Graphic novel about Mzungus in Development and Governments.

Meet Omar, the one with the fake beard. Omar is an anthropologist from the African country (un)imaginatively called Democratic Republic of Straight Lines

(DRSL). Specializing on the International Development and Humanitarian sector, he is interested in the expatriate community in charge of aid. Those working to alleviate poverty, respond to crises and strengthen the public sector: the Mzungus, as some African languages call them. In particular, Omar documents their customs, beliefs and interactions with the local society. Based between London and DRSL City, he is often invited to speak on behalf of Africa at various conferences. In 2018, he completed his PhD, but no academic journal agreed to publish any part of it, so his friends Naga and Greta convinced him to turn it into a graphic novel and publish it online. It tells stories of Mzungus and Goals that were never reached, and it is called #MDGs: Mzungus in Development and Governments.

Omar summarised the first 6 sections of his Research Methodology Chapter for us below. Allegra lab will then publish a new section of this fantastic PhD comic every week!

Who are these Mzungus?

Etymologically, they are "persons of foreign descent, who wander around without a purpose and behave rich." With a little help from his friends Naga and Greta and a disguise, Omar observes and documents the unrealistic Goals of MDGs posted in his country.
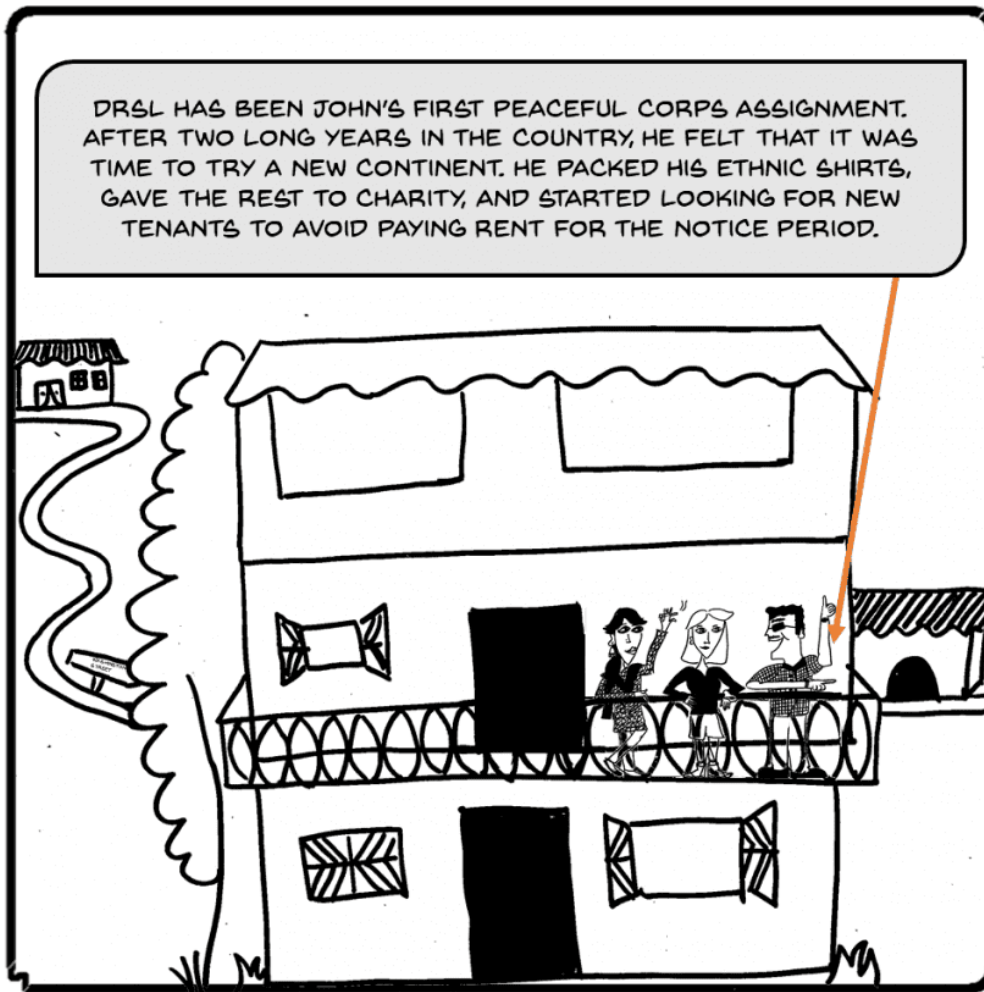
In Section 1 we get to know Washington Street, its people and stories: John's quest for more adrenaline; Paulo's midnight capoeira; Lisa and Amir's love despite geography; Abdallah and his wife's patience for mispronounced consonants; the cats' patience with lonely humans; Anne, who doesn't know about power cuts and Jose, who does know the unfairness of employment policies. Most importantly, we get to know the new tenants of Washington Street: Naga and Greta, who welcome Omar in their apartment.

In Section 2 Omar shows the different methods used in his field research: disguising as taxi driver to be invisible in the eyes of Mzungus; socializing and calling it unstructured interviews; powerlessly listening to Mzungus' fascination with divided societies and calling it semi-structured interviews. He also learns about career progress in crisis, rest and recuperation, the large arrays of roles a memsahib can take on, and finally loses his patience in front of the lack of a critical mass of skills. Time for some R&R.

In Section 3 Omar is introduced to humanitarian clubbing and, at the end of a long evening, wishes to have a job that does not include clubbing with humanitarians and alike. He also interviews Naga on working in development: the lack of space, the lack of visas, but also the admiration for her local perspective on poverty. Finally, after some intense fieldwork, Omar finds the evidence showing that the fight to extinguish hunger for Terms of References that don't require knowledge of the socio-political context is still unaccomplished, and therefore: 1) his PhD is justified; 2) more humanitarian clubbing might be needed.

In Section 4 Omar seeks inspiration from Naga and Greta's workplaces for his documentary evidence. After all, Mzungus need to sustain their livelihoods too. Naga also develops a proxy indicator to measure their household welfare. How many times do you hear TIA* every day?

*YOU KNOW THE OLD AFRICAN SAYING ABOUT HOW HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF SON. THERE IS NO NEED FOR NEW RESEARCH. YOU STAY WITH US AND WE'LL PROVIDE STORIES AND FOOD, SO YOU CAN ALSO GAIN SOME WEIGHT, MY POOR CHILD.

In Section 5 Omar begins to question the novelty of his research and begins to feel a strange déjà vu as his grandfather quotes to him from the Empire's archives. Are all these "solutions" just wild ghosts with softer names and more PC** donors? Is he beginning to get as dizzy as his subjects of research?

In Section 6 Omar unpacks the hidden differences in an otherwise seemingly monolithic Mzungus tribe: ethnic divides caused by The Mosquito, The Bottled Water or The Duty Station – or a combination of the three; and competitions on who has it longer (no, not *that*, Mzungus comply with masculinity models taught in anti-sexual harassment courses). Omar also discovers that the different tribes, often on the verge of civil war or space grabbing at boring dinners, unite and blindly follow one single holy book (Hint: With information of most value to Mzungus).

*This is Africa
**Politically Correct

Sign up [here](#) to receive this weekly comic in your inbox, or stay tuned

Notes on a Postcard

Siobhán McGuirk
October, 2019

The exhibition *The World Exists To Be Put on A Postcard* has been running at the British Museum throughout the summer. It is an apt location for any exhibition of postcards—like the museum itself, these objects are deeply entwined with the

colonial project. Sold alongside 'living dioramas' at worlds' fairs, or purchased by European officials and their families in order to share a glimpse of the 'exotic' with family back home, picture postcards played a key role in circulating racist imaginaries and imperial ideologies throughout the early twentieth century (Hoskins 2007, Jain 2018). The 'golden age' of the picture postcard not only coincided with a fervent period of colonial expansion, it also fuelled and profited from it (Geary and Webb 1998).

Postcards retain significant presence within museum and gallery spaces, from the archives to the gift shop. Postcard collections are valued for the historical and personal insights they offer—in some cases via image, in others due to the written texts they carry.

Postcards sent by early anthropologists, for example, reveal perspectives that contrast with their self-consciously composed field notes—often casting their formal writing in a quite different light.

Postcards are also among the most popular items sold to museum visitors. Whether these commodities are kept, gifted or mailed by their buyers, they function to circulate collected and curated objects beyond the spaces that house them, subtly endorsing this increasingly contested act.

Postcards do other things too, of course. They have been recently touted as an accessible medium for buying art, for example via The Royal College of Art's popular [RCA Secret](#) annual charity auction. They have been used in sociological projects—both academic and popular—as a means of offering real anonymity in crowd-sourced research in the digital age. [PostSecret](#), for example, continues to yield books, travelling displays, and new additions to its digitized archive that boasts a huge international audience. Postcards double as posters and flyers for activists' causes and events, documenting the history and contours of social justice movements. They are sold in tourist hotspots (and cold spots) the world over, often continuing to promote troubling imaginaries of exoticized people and places intertwined with mundane 'wish you were here' sentiment (cf. Robinson

2014, Kurtz 2017). Even as smart phone apps facilitate instantaneous transnational communication—of image, text and sound—postcards remain popular. They are pinned to walls and fridges, boxed away as keepsakes, wedged in stacks of mail.

I have been thinking a great deal about the potential uses and signifiers of picture postcards while co-curating a 'global museum of equalities' for the Global Gender and Cultures of Equality (GlobalGRACE) project. In GlobalGRACE, six teams in six different countries are using arts-based methods to research and respond to local issues relating to gender, wellbeing and cultures of equality. Each team comprises academics and NGO staff. The museum is one platform through which we will bring together our disparate research activities and findings and place them in conversation for a broad public audience.

As both researchers and curators, my colleague Nirmal Puwar and I are as interested in exploring processes of communication and idea formation as we are concerned about securing objects for display. Postcards have become a central device in our work, offering opportunities for both. We remain mindful of their historical uses and impact, however, so that our experiments in producing and exchanging our own postcards might create pathways to subverting, not replicating, historical anthropological and colonial perspectives. These experiments engage questions of how researchers might differently visualize, articulate and share ideas about and from our field sites, in the dual context of conducting 'anthropology at home' and of asserting the value of transnational—particularly south-south—exchange within local and global academic communities.

Experimenting with Postcards

We are using postcards for three core, overlapping purposes: as a research method, as a communication device and as exhibition objects.

Our first experiment with postcards took place as part of a small-scale exhibition entitled *Exchanging Cultures of Equality*, which marked the launch of the GlobalGRACE project in June 2018, at Goldsmiths University of London.

 Two months ahead of the scheduled exhibition opening, we wrote to our as-yet unmet colleagues to request contributions for display. We asked each team to send us six images, each one accompanied by a short text of no more than 50 words, for us to make into postcards. We chose the device in order to render explicit that our 'views from the field' were partial glimpses, not definitive statements, marking only the beginning of a transnational conversation about our research sites and sensibilities.

The request posed productive and revealing challenges. Teams distributed responsibility for selecting images and texts in different ways. Some sets were chosen by consensus, intended to be coherent and complementary. Other sets

were chosen by team members working independently, presenting distinct views on one topic. Ethical questions concerning attribution and informed consent arose as researchers and NGO workers assessed, from different perspectives, if and how pictures and words recorded in the field could now be put on display in London and online.

Particularly for teams that work with visual media, choosing just six images was felt to be too constraining. The word limit proved frustrating for all. Via email, our Brazilian colleagues reminded us of the importance of 'challeng[ing] the hegemony and normalization of English as the dominant language' in our presentation of text. This prompted important discussions regarding intended audience, and highlighted the tension between desires to be, or conversely to refuse to be, legible in an inescapably colonial context.

We decided to retain but visibly deemphasize English by displacing and shrinking translated text. Prioritizing and stylistically differentiating languages in this way served to highlight the multilingual nature of the GlobalGRACE project. It also gestured to the fraught, often demanding, processes of translation—between cultures as well as languages—that are both constant in, and central to, the project. Preparing the digital postcards for print required text be transformed into high-resolution image files, obliging multiple back-and-forth exchanges between colleagues as we proof-read across multiple alphabets, and against "font incompatibility" and other design software anomalies.

We regard this collaborative digital labour as a productive entanglement in wires crossed, much like time spent mining our respective languages for concepts and meanings that otherwise risk being lost in translation.

In the days before the exhibition launch, we invited team members to reflect on the postcard creation process and their thoughts on the display. We recorded these informal conversations and placed the resulting audio into landline phones that lined the exhibition walls—another communication device threatened by mobile technology. The phones allowed visitors (to the exhibition and to the [online archive](#)) to listen in, peeling back another layer of the curatorial process while emphasising the ongoing conversational nature of our project.

Visitors easily read the postcards as devices made, not physically sent through the mail. They were displayed with 'front' and 'back' impossibly side-by-side, with neatly printed, not handwritten, text. They remained unaddressed, pointing to a broad public as our intended audience. A project logo 'stamp' signified the conduit—not the destination—for the exchange. We used a different set of postcards to invite visitors, including GlobalGRACE team members, to continue the conversation underway by sharing their handwritten postcard replies. Such feedback loops make further visible the processes of exchange, debate, and reflection that too-often take place behind the scenes in anthropological, and other, exhibition spaces.

Sending postcards

We continue to experiment as the GlobalGRACE project moves forward. We have invited team members to share informal, personal writing in the form of digital 'postcards from the field'. Unlike 'notes'—which for the anthropologist connotes structured if unorganized topical insights—postcards elicit expectations of conviviality, intimacy; the offer only of a partial glimpse. These digital postcards recognize and value features of research that are rarely shared publicly in academic or professional spaces, but that have proven deeply productive in forging intellectual as well as personal connections across our transnational research teams: doubts, hopes, flights of fancy, still-forming ideas, lessons learned along the way.

Looking ahead to the 'global museum of equalities' exhibition in Cape Town in 2021, we have invited project members to make and send postcards to their counterparts overseas. This experiment builds on our previous collaborative curatorial experience in a new context of deeper interpersonal and cross-project understanding, forged over two years of working together. These will be tailored by the sender for the recipient, and reliant on international mail services to arrive at their destination. Those that make it may be redacted, as the sender or recipient choose, within the exhibition.

We are interested in the different choices that might be made by team members tasked with selecting, writing and mailing a bespoke postcard to a specific colleague across the world—a quite different proposition than digital files sent via email for potentially limitless duplication and public consumption. Project members—ourselves included—are currently working on their own postcards. Our 'deadline' for posting is still months away, but we are already anticipating new questions about processes of transnational academic exchange: What different material and tactile qualities would these made objects amass? How might the physical journey of the object changes its meaning, or rhetorical power? How differently might they be read, in the hands of recipients or on museum walls? How might the affective power of receiving (and of sending) such an object shape our professional, intellectually productive, relationships? Can such qualities be rendered understandable to exhibition audiences—or to project funders? If so,

how?

This proposed experiment, and our use of postcards overall, has prompted important debates within and between project teams. Across the six GlobalGRACE research sites, popular postcards continue to promote a Western gaze that reproduces racialized and gendered visions of exotic others. Some colleagues have raised doubts that these framings are open to subversion; that the format can present ethnographic imagery otherwise. Others disagree, and have stressed the democratizing power of the postcard: a familiar form that presents an opportunity to 'open up' research process to broader audiences.

As we work with still and moving images across the project, we continue to grapple with the potential of echoing rather than challenging the colonial gaze of the picture postcard.

The *National Geographic* vision of 'good' imagery continues to shape popular ideas about the style and content of photographs presumed suitable for museum walls—despite, by that magazine's own admission, its promotion of deeply racist frames (Goldberg 2018). In our projects, not least in mounting our own 'museum', we must embrace critical self-reflection and discussion in order to confront, rather than avoid, such influences.

We do not know where these experiments will lead us as yet, but we do expect to find some answers on a postcard.

Acknowledgement

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Featured image by David Chu (flickr, *CC BY 2.0*)

#Review: After Ethnos

Shaheed Tayob
October, 2019

After Ethnos is a philosophically sophisticated provocation and inspiration towards a new mode of anthropological analysis that breaks free from the classic conflation of anthropology with ethnography and of ethnography with fieldwork. Tobias Rees proposes an anthropology that moves beyond the taken for granted

reliance on the category of the human as it emerged in 18th century enlightenment theory. Rejecting "the human" and "man" as the object of analysis means displacing the cognate concepts of "culture," "society," and "the social" for explaining "the human," and rethinking ethnography as the more or less objective

scientific method of this endeavor. For Rees, discarding these flawed paradigms leads towards a conception of "a philosophically inclined anthropology" (chapter 1) as "an anthropology 'of' the human/after 'the human'" (34). He characterizes this new mode of anthropological enquiry as "a practice of fieldwork-based immersion that revolves around the discovery of the unanticipated"(34) which forces a reconsideration of the category of the human.

The end-goal is not a new paradigm or theory, but rather a new sensibility which releases humans, the world, and philosophy from their mooring in 18th century enlightenment humanism.

Rees therefore provincializes the 18th century concept of the human as a "recently invented concept that emerged in Europe about 250 years ago and that became subsequently universalized" (40). His anthropology "'of' the human/ after 'the human'" aims to reveal instances that "escape" this enlightenment conception of the human (40). However, he is suspicious of Latour's Actor Network Theory (ANT) and the so-called ontological turn, that seek to replace one over-determined conception of the human, with another "supposedly better" alternative (41). Rather, he proposes anthropology as "an analysis of movement/in terms of movement" as an *exposure* "of oneself, of one's analytical categories, and of the established concepts of the human that are built into these categories." Fieldwork as *exposure* entails "immersing oneself into scenes of everyday life in order to let the chance events that make up fieldwork/research give rise to an unanticipated, unforeseen difference" (41) as a continuous process, not towards a new closure, but as "singular openings" through which "the very condition of possibility of anthropology" can be reinvented (42).

Rees questions the association of fieldwork with ethnography credited to Malinowski who "likened anthropology to the arts" in order to grasp the "native point of view" (79). Contrary to anthropology as the study of difference in place with regard to far-away Others, he proposes attention to "difference in time". He retains an emphasis on fieldwork, however, now as "an artful-experimental-

technique" that "produce[s] surprise," (80) and is hence centered around "accidents that have the power to disrupt the taken for granted" (82). Following Deleuze in search of the actual Rees thus finds a place for anthropology and fieldwork as an attempt to capture the irreducible singularity that reigns "in the forms of recognitions, of openings, of surprises, of discoveries, of derailments" (104) that may reveal the cracks and fissures in established ways of knowing and viewing the world.

After Ethnos is admirable in that it reveals the fallacy of a positivist mode of anthropology that deals with fieldwork data as "facts" and which posits different moral values or ontologies as the basis for research.
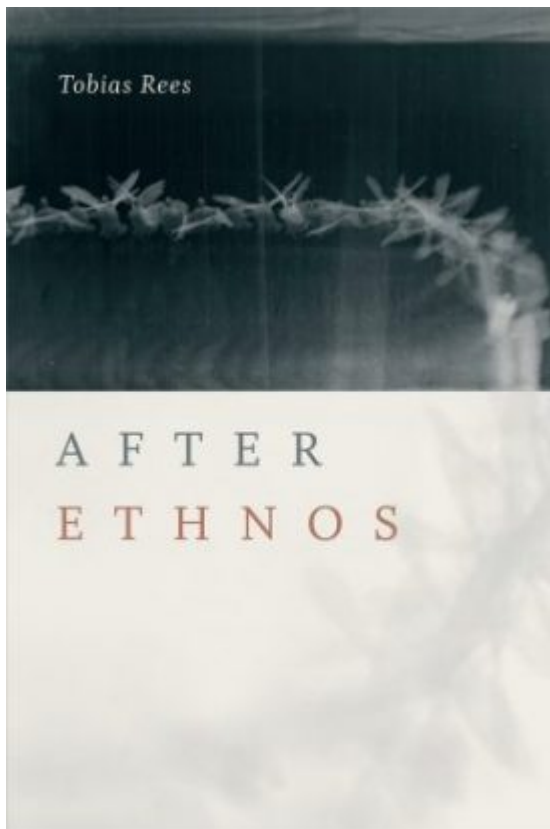
Indeed, as Edward Said made so clear, studying the Other is also always about producing the Other (Said 1978). However, a number of issues in Rees' argument necessitate caution.

Firstly, his analysis of the 18th century category of the human as a "recently invented concept" relies on a very particular history of the Enlightenment that runs completely against Rees's own caution against epochal analyses – expressed later in the book – as "clear-cut ruptures that divide the world…into…before and after" (95). Indeed, as many scholars have argued the genealogy of humanism as it emerged during the 18th century enlightenment was novel, but not totally unprecedented. For example, thirteenth century Maghrebi sociologist Ibn khaldun laid the groundwork for many 'modern' theories of state formation and society. Similarly, the ontological rupture between humans and animals was not unknown either. For example, Ibn Tufayl's twelfth century philosophical tale, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, is a reflection on God, humans and animals that clearly articulates an ontological divide but which does not authorize a relation of absolute domination (Goodman 1972). Rather than relying on the notion of an epochal rupture, which produces the idea of western specificity and particularity, is the important work on the transactional production of modern categories of thought through imperial encounters (van der Veer 2001; Chidester 1996).

A more thorough genealogy of modern categories reveal that they are not as "invented" as Rees argues.

Rees's emphasis on "surprise" and "movement" also deserves critical reflection. Both notions are necessarily tied to a particular location and set of assumptions. For example, a racist may well be surprised by the intelligence of a black woman, but that hardly counts as a critical insight. The notion of surprise that Reese relies on is entirely dependent on the very categorization of Enlightenment humanism which he riles against. The work of revealing the violence of 18th century humanism and its devastating effects in the colonies and to the environment is well established (Cesaire 2001; Haraway 2008).

Contrary to Rees's assumption, 18th century enlightenment humanism may have been universalized through Western philosophy and conquest, but as Talal Asad's work illustrates, it has not necessarily been hegemonic (Asad 1986; Asad 2003). Paying attention to the instances that escape the Western Enlightenment conception of the human does not necessarily require Deleuzian philosophy nor the heroic impulse to *exposure* and *capture* which Reese proposes.

In fact, it is precisely the heroism of Rees conception of anthropology and fieldwork that is most concerning. Enlightenment humanism and the development of anthropology were not merely conceptual problems, but were intimately tied to the desire to know and conquer. To argue for the complex history of knowledge production as a conceptual problem, devoid of conquest, is a mistake. It allows Reese to articulate a new kind of heroism, this time tied to a desire to *capture* the irreducible openness of becoming. However recent anthropological work on, say,

giving and receiving charity in Cairo has shown how alternative conceptions of the human exist alongside the shrines and mosques in the city (Mittermaier 2019). Conceiving of human and non-human animals as all subject to the mercy and grace of God provides a discursive and embodied way of being in the world that authorizes practices of care and giving without the heroic impulse to change the world, nor with an over determined sense of the human as autonomous individual bounded self. Producing these insights requires careful attention to the discursive and material constellations through which everyday life unfolds. It entails *humility in learning from others* not to get at a "native point of view" but to allow different conceptions of the human to emerge. Conceptions that both unsettle the fallacies of Enlightenment humanism and of hegemonic Western determinism.

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Featured image by Daniel Olah (Courtesy of Unsplash)

Anthropology at, and of, the Limit

Ruben Andersson
October, 2019

Where do we draw the line of separation? Who draws it, and for which purposes? When the former interior minister of Italy, Matteo Salvini, launched his little war against the German sea rescue captain Carola Rackete, recounted on these pages by Sébastien Bachelet, he was consciously drawing the line of separation among EU citizens rather than just between Europeans and unwanted outsiders. But in doing so, he was also tapping into a much deeper political story, and into a peculiar mapping of the world, that separates safety from danger, global 'red

zones' from 'green zones', community from supposedly external chaos.

It is this story, and this map, that *No Go World* takes as its object of inquiry. This was a tricky task, I found. Not only is anthropology's methodology rather hard to adapt to such an elusive and multi-scalar topic, but the tangle of dominant narratives and cartographies of insecurity and danger turns the story into a tapestry of only partially interwoven strands. Border security, risk management, counterterror, humanitarianism and peacekeeping mix and mingle in the 'danger zones' on the margins of the world map, rendering the picture unclear even to insiders. Yet what *is* clear is the harm and error besetting the political story of a dangerous world 'out there' that must be kept at bay. It separates, at a time when more solidarity and connection are needed. It cuts accountability and responsibility, and so deepens the dangers. And it generates incentives for escalation, as seen whenever 'partner' regimes in the fight against migration or the war on terror threaten Western donors with severe consequences unless they receive more resources for their role in containing faraway threats.

There are many strands to pick out from the three thoughtful responses to the book, but let me start with an important point raised by Anna Tuckett. Commenting on the predicament of African aid workers and soldiers sent to deal with the dangers in the 'red zone' of Mali's conflict-hit north, she notes how they share with sweat-shop and call-centre workers worldwide a 'position at the sharp end of global capitalism'.

In other words, the dangerous division of labour at work in distant danger zones is part of a much wider evasion of responsibility and risk by powerful groups.

I saw this not just among aid workers and peacekeepers in Mali, but also among ordinary civilians who welcomed internally displaced people (IDPs) in their own courtyards for months on end and with nothing in return.

At worst, such 'export' comes with criminal blame attached, as when European states refuse to rescue people in distress only to then point the finger at those who end up shouldering this responsibility, such as Captain Rackete. We must also note how such states not just offload but also keep *generating* risk: it is obvious that the thoughtless NATO intervention in Libya fomented the very chaos seen in the Mediterranean in the past years, while helping to [kindle conflict in Mali](#) further south. In other words, to analyse these seemingly disparate situations we must understand on a systemic level how risks and responsibilities keep being offloaded by powerful interveners – and the best way to do so may well be to expand our story into wider sectors of the global economy, from outsourced factories to insourced 'migrant jobs', as Tuckett suggests.
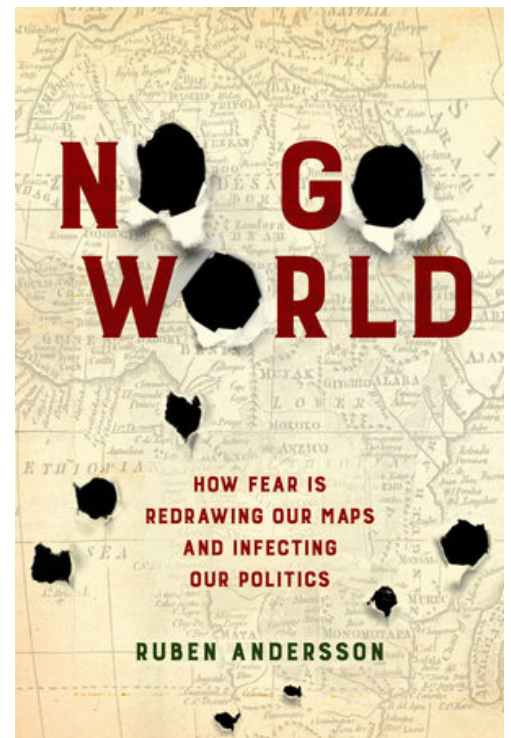
This point goes to the heart of a more disciplinary point I wish to make: that anthropologists must step up efforts to re-scale our methods and analyses as we grapple with the man-made 'crises' of our times. Two of the reviews remark on the somewhat unorthodox approach of *No Go World,* at least as far as ethnography is concerned; it is, I am very much aware, not very 'ethnographic' in the strict sense. Yet this is in some ways the point. It would be a very valuable thing to explore at book length how a particular local society interacts with the messiness of international security intervention, for instance in Mali's embattled north. Yet it is another thing entirely to try and understand the logics and modus operandi of the wider system of interventions of which this particular case forms a part. The country's peacekeeping and counterterror missions, after all, are intimately tied up not just with the NATO intervention in Libya or with European fears of African migration, but also with a wider separation of interveners and local society, as seen from the [bunker walls of Kabul](#) to the 'remote management'

of Syrian aid. Tackling these systemic features of 'security' must inevitably mean experimenting with method, analysis and style in a way that lets us weave together different scales, as Tuckett notes – reaching from the local to the global and back again. In my concluding notes to the book, I suggest an intimate anthropology of systems may be a way of doing so, drawing on pioneering strands of our discipline's history as well as on vast literatures beyond it.

Grappling with systemic problems, I should add, is not just an anthropological task – it is also an acute challenge for the interveners themselves. Ignacio Fradejas-García offers intriguing observations of the frustration and indifference experienced by remote aid managers working on Syria, to the point where the site of aid delivery inside the war-torn country drops off the cartographic margins, in a faint echo of the dangerous limits of Medieval maps with which *No Go World* begins. I encountered this mix of frustration and indifference myself among aid workers and UN personnel stuck in their headquarters in Mali's capital, Bamako. Aid officials complained they had little idea of what happened with their assistance up north. UN staff knew they had to understand the intricate links between shifting separatist factions and their turfs of contraband and control, yet were painfully aware of their shallow grasp while stationed at a remove. As for peacekeepers, one of them scathingly called Mali's UN mission a 'giant with a bloated head and clay feet', with too many qualified staff stuck in a five-star hotel HQ in Bamako while the dangerous north remained in the hands of under-equipped and underprepared African soldiers. By the time I left, in 2014, the clay feet were already wobbling, in an omen of the insecurity that would soon spread south to central Mali and across the region.

In short, the anthropologist and the intervener both grapple with the limits of their reach within a wider systemic picture of risk and danger. Often, it may seem easier to step back from this limit. As scholars we may re-focus our research elsewhere, retreating into our safe zone of small-scale ethnography. Interveners who do go to Mali and other 'danger zones' may withdraw to their offices and rooftop reggae parties, comforted by a fragile sense of security in hostile lands. Others actively seek to breach the limit, reaping the rewards (and risks) of

confronting danger. Yet in *No Go World,* I rather ended up taking the *limit itself* as my object of inquiry. As I did so, I used ethnography as a tool for probing the waters:

> *how far does it reach and what do the limits of participant observation tell us, once we scale up and compare our predicament with wider systemic trends in intervention, reaching from reinforced borders to bunkers in the field?*

In a sense, I was turning ethnography 'inside out', using myself as the pivot for inverting my focus from out-of-reach local realities to the systemic features that generated the disconnect and withdrawal – not just in Mali, but elsewhere too, from Libya and Somalia to Afghanistan and even the US-Mexico border.

This takes me, in a roundabout way, to Sebastien Bachelet's important notes on the wider separations and prohibitions haunting societies at the 'destination' end. Here, again, we see transfers of risk in full swing. As aid programming (and I include here overseas aid-funded academic studies) is increasingly conducted at a distance, those on the frontline are all too often prohibited from being fully included in it. In our academic corner, visa refusals are just one part of this story – another is the unequal division of labour that leaves [local 'data-gatherers'](#) in the field excluded from the benefits of research. The logic echoes that affecting local or 'regional' aid workers, peacekeepers and freelance fixers and reporters in crisis zones: insource the gains, outsource the risks.

Turning to the public debate, what we academics can offer as we straddle these unequal social worlds is perhaps a critical mapping of the circulation of risks, costs and gains across the limits – revealing that which is pushed into the shadows, away from the bright light of the global highway.

> *But we must also dig deeper, beyond the dreary balance sheet of risk, and help tell a different story beyond that of danger and division.*

As Bachelet notes, elements of another story are already there in rescues and

migrant journeys that draw a tentative cartography of hope. Besides such elusive hope, perhaps reclaiming the idea of *protection* could be part of this 'other story'. As rescue volunteers and Mali's IDP hosts show us by their example, 'protecting borders' must give way to protecting *people*. Yet such a shift may only come about via a redrawing of the political map's stark borderlines between red and green zones, whose artificial limits bear little relation to the systemic nature of global danger and risk.

If one of anthropology's big challenges today is to speak to the wider political and systemic trends beyond our immediate 'fields', we must perhaps – somewhat like those sea rescue captains, or even those interveners struggling with their arm's-length presence in Mali – seek to inhabit and explore the limits of the political map, as well as of our ethnographic heritage. There, in the interstices, the beginnings of another story, anthropological or political, may well be found.

Ruben Andersson. 2019. [No Go World How Fear Is Redrawing Our Maps and Infecting Our Politics](). University of California Press.

[Featured image]() (cropped) by [Olle Svensson]() (flickr, [CC BY 2.0]())
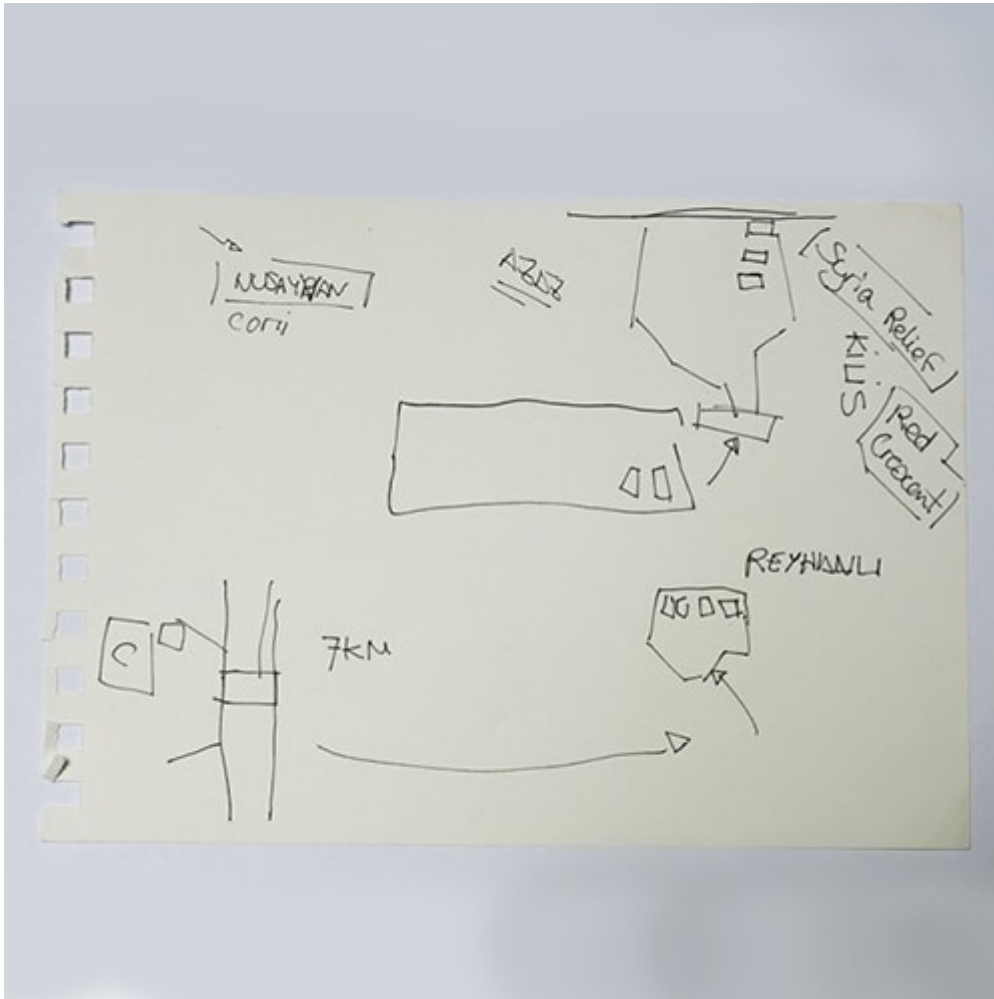

Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The No-Map and the Fear of Being in the

No Go World

Ignacio Fradejas-García
October, 2019

The NGO personnel in Gaziantep's office (Turkey) was in shock. Little groups were talking loudly in Arabic, or keeping their lips firmly closed. "It was an air-strike", my Syrian office mate told me as he showed me two pictures just arrived from inside Syria. The car was a heap of smouldering scrap metal in the middle of a stone-paved road. "Of course, I know him", he responded me as if the doctor were still alive. Dr Hassan Mohammed al-Araj [passed away](#) in Hama province, Syria, on 13th April 2016, the [last cardiologist](#) in this zone. Being a medical professional working in a rebel area makes you a target. The Russian air force

supposedly targeted him via the SIM card left in his car to effectively geo-localise him, my informants suggested. A feeling of remorse engulfed my colleagues working from outside of the country to support those who risk their lives inside the country to delivery aid. However, after a time of condolences and the funeral, they kept working even harder, with no time for sadness. This was the only way to cope with the feeling of not working inside of the riskiest part of the map of fear.
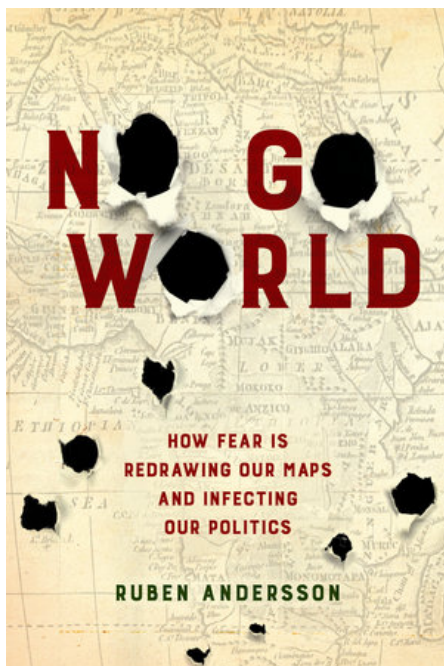
How maps of risk and fear are being redrawn is the subject of Ruben Andersson's ethnography of the global politics of fear and economies of risk and danger. The book is an prodigious collection of interrelated examples about the emergence of global danger zones from the Sahel to Afghanistan, explaining global and local complex practices of risk and fear, a *psychogeographic* journey around Western/-ers' production of maps of the Other. Of course, this review essay is a reduction of the author's 300 pages of research, good writing, engaging anthropology and farsightedness. As in his previous texts, which are very connected with the book, Ruben is one step ahead, showing new paths of analysis and inquiry on highly relevant topics. Thus, it is difficult to make a contribution to this thoughtful work. Nonetheless, I'll try and offer a few insights, as the Allegra editors suggested, to enter into a dialogue with the book. I come to this discussion from my own research and experiences, based on my own ethnographic research (2019) about aid workers in Turkey managing the humanitarian operation for Syria, which has in some ways been inspired by the work of Andersson.

As the initial vignette shows, the risks might be evident for some interveners, who know very well the 'dragons' inhabiting the 'no go world' — using Andersson's words. At the same time, as Andersson aptly describes, I found other aid interveners who did not know anything about what was happening in the field, outside their bunkers and safeguarded offices.

This securitization produces frustration, but also indifference about the distant and remote.

I have found some interveners who did not care about what was happening out there as result of the aid machinery solutions for interventions from afar. As example, a UN official in charge of some cross-border operations drew upon my request a map of how the humanitarian delivery takes place in the border (see featured image, above). As can be seen in the drawing of the Turkish side, Syria is out of out of the map, out of the page, only marked the town of Azaz in the other side.

Placing the no go areas outside the maps reminds me of medieval times, when the westernmost point of the Iberian Peninsula, the Cape of Finisterre – from the Latin *finis terrae,* which means the end of the earth — was land's end, and left out the unknown.

In order to avoid risks and fears we simply cannot represent these on our mind maps, as expressed in the saying, 'out of sight, out of mind'.

This mechanism holds true for the aid system because the division of labour and tasks, the power asymmetries between decision makers and implementers, and the fear to take responsibility for abundant failures, have produced a machinery where each person knows only one part of the aid process. At first glance, 'being there' is something for interveners to strive for – as it is for the anthropologists. However, accepting the mechanism of doing only my part allows knowing only one fragment of the map, the 'safe go world'. The unknown, or the bulimic recurrence of dangers and risks in media, in politics, in donors' interests, and in securitization training might create fear, as the book perfectly explains, but also ignorance and a lack of care about what is happening at a distance in the 'no-map'. In other words, some interveners directly disregard the geography of fear or risk because it has no impact in their daily working lives. In the same vein, this no-care mechanism might work for people living in the go world. The other side of

the coin might be those who risk their lives within the no-go-world, or just living among dragons — sometimes without any chance of exiting — as well as those interveners, like my Syrian colleagues working outside, whose greater knowledge is to know the risk map like the backs of their hands.

When I asked interveners to draw the humanitarian operation for me, some were blocked in front of the blank page, even when I added, 'Imagine I know nothing about the operation'. That is the case of redrawing the maps with fears, they produce stories of dragons for many people who know nothing about the areas being redrawn. I agree with Ruben, in times of dystopia everywhere stories of utopias are needed, and if I might add something, stories of care about others to avoid the growth of dragons.

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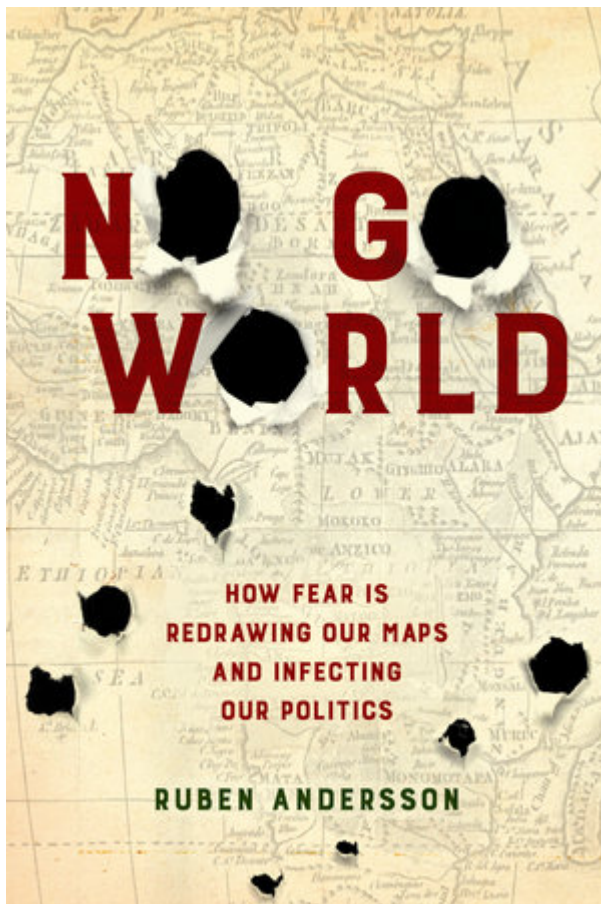
Featured image © Ignacio Fradejas-García.

No Go World: The Map of Danger, Reconnections and 'Crimes of Solidarity'

Sébastien Bachelet
October, 2019

Andersson's new opus is a haunting and insightful examination of those remote zones of danger and insecurity that are distant yet at the centre of 'our new world disorder' (p3). [No Go World](#) outlines how economies of risks and politics of fear are firmly entangled – with dramatic consequences for many, including those contained in the buffer zones around rich Western nations and the expendable intermediaries bearing the brunt of risky interventions in situations of crisis managed increasingly remotely. In keeping in line with the focus of Andersson's previous book and its insightful exploration of the ['illegality industry'](#), there is again a prominent *cui bono* thread running through *No Go World*. In this forbidding story of 'global distancing and endangerment' (p6), Andersson eloquently highlights how the production of insecurity and danger in fact benefits some lines of business, thereby creating both 'winners and losers' (p20) as those attempting to ward off danger also end up stoking it. However, the sense of control over remote zones of danger, as argued by Andersson, is ultimately illusory as 'such remote interventions tend to generate as many problems as they purportedly solve' (p240).

No Go World displays a broad scope, both in terms of geographical focus and the range of actors and organisations revolving around those danger zones. Although it sometimes begs for more ethnographic encounters in and around those marginal regions depicted as hotbeds of danger and insecurity, Andersson nimbly points out how he was himself kept at bay from such zones, stalled by university ethics and risk assessment procedures, themselves closely entwined with the

wider web of vested interests deep-rooted into risk calculus. It is worth noting here, in addition to his remarks about the increasing difficulties for researchers to go into regions deemed too dangerous, that carrying out collaborative and participatory research projects with those confined to the regions of the world deemed unsanitary and dangerous is also hindered when collaborators cannot cross over the other way. In the UK context, Alison Phipps, the UNESCO chair for refugee integration, recently [denounced the 'discriminatory' and 'embarrassing' visitor visa system](#) and accused the British government of effectively setting up 'a secret travel ban', preventing academics, especially from Africa and the Middle East, to visit and take part in project activities – even when they are fully sponsored and the events are, ironically, government-funded.

The denial of visas to academics from beyond the confines of affluent and security-obsessed western nations is not surprising. It occurs in an age of fast mobility for the happy few and forceful containment for the rest – with a rising tally in terms of human lives lost to hostile migration politics. Andersson does not profess to offer a magical cure amidst his diagnosis of the 'interventionist ills besetting especially Western (and West-backed) power' (p17) yet he sketches out a number of crucial cardinal points for anthropologists and others who wish to counter the prevailing cartography of danger.

We need a new story, a new map which take cue of how the dominant map of fear and risk work, but one which charts a more positive road ahead to enable us to reconnect.

Trading fear, risk and danger for a cartography that hinges on solidarity, equality and hope is not easy. Yet, elements of such utopian reconnections are already there.

The very journeys made by migrants and refugees out of those danger zones are themselves marked by hope as researchers have relentlessly pointed out. The dominant discourses in public debates about a global 'migration crisis' that contribute to fear-peddling politics have fuelled depictions of journeys across the

Mediterranean and the Rio Grande (amongst others) as a pervasive threat to western culture, welfare-states, security, job-market, housing stock etc. Such dangerous representations are far from the ways migrants themselves envision their own restricted mobility. While exploring irregular migration in Morocco, I met several young men from sub-Saharan Africa who had undertaken the perilous and uncertain journeys to the Mediterranean region. They hoped to make the next dangerous leap towards Europe, often by crossing into the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Identitarian movements, obsessed by theories of the 'great replacement', have depicted such journeys as violent incursions to plunder and destroy Europe. My informants described themselves as 'adventurers' on a quest – they were 'looking for their lives' (Bachelet 2019), searching for the opportunities which had been denied to them by political instability and economic precariousness. These dangerous yet hopeful journeys across barbed wire and treacherous waters take place in a deeply uncertain world, where hope is not evenly distributed and where the opulent spectacle of modernity is, for many, something 'to be seen but not to be touched or lived in' (Kleist 2016: 4). Although different from the youngsters attracted by the dark zones described by Andersson, 'adventurers' from sub-Saharan Africa also talked with enthusiasm and pride about the courage needed to undertake risky journeys towards Europe.

Reframing movement as an opportunity, as suggested by Andersson, is a hard sell at the moment.

> *The revival of nationalist and far-right movements across Europe illustrates how embracing and welcoming the other, the stranger, is far from the top of the political agenda.*

The hostility and criminalization of migration extends towards those who intervene in defence of refugees and other migrants, as illustrated by the arrest of

Carola Rackete, captain of the Sea-Watch 3 vessel on 29th June, after she docked into the Lampedusa harbour in defiance of Italian authorities' order to keep away. The boat carried over 40 migrants rescued from flimsy rubber dinghies on the

Mediterranean. Rackete was accused of endangering a military speedboat and its occupants as she forced her way into the harbour, threatened with a lengthy prison sentence and a hefty fine. [She apologised](#), highlighting that "the situation was desperate" and she was only concerned with "bring[ing] exhausted and desperate people to shore".

The standoff between Carola Rackete and Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini who has enforced a 'closed-ports policy' is one of the latest in a divided Europe where those daring to rescue and provide assistance to migrants are criminalised and accused of 'aiding illegal migration'. Beyond the elusive figure of the 'smuggler', the type of activities for which individuals (and organizations) can be prosecuted range from giving a lift to migrants, providing food or shelter, preventing deportation flights, helping migrants to cross borders and rescuing people at sea. There has been a series of highly mediatised cases against pro-migration activists (such as Cédric Herou in France, Helena Melano in Spain, Scott Warren in the USA, Elin Ersson in Sweden etc.). In her 2018 report ['Saving Lives is not a Crime'](#), Agnès Callamard (Special Rapporteur of the UN Human Rights Council) draws a parallel between acts of solidarity during WW2 and the current migration crisis; she argues that "by criminalizing acts of solidarity, States are violating normative pillars of international human rights and humanitarian law" (OHCHR 2018). Although stories have often focused on European citizens, we should not forget that people on the southern shores of the Mediterranean have also refused the deadly logics of hostile migration politics, as illustrated by the stories of Tunisian fishermen arrested by Italian authorities while towing migrants to safety.

The debates over 'crimes of solidarity' and the deterring measures taken against those who provide support to refugees and other migrants are another example of the kind of contagion described by Andersson when he argues that "in a climate of fear, the border emerges as an almost limitless emotional resource for a certain breed of politicians" (p159). In *No Go Zones*, Andersson powerfully illustrates how the map of dangers that separates black and red zones from safe green ones is fallacious since the 'danger is not out there but already with us' (p248).

We must be wary of how those who are complicit in 'unspooling a long cordon sanitaire across the Mediterranean, promising to separate green from red zones' (p171) stand to benefit from it.

The criminalisation of those who act in solidarity and support migrants 'in their unbearable practices of freedom' (Tazzioli 2018: 10) is a dangerous development. Fears of contamination also affect those accused of treason for holding an ['open border mindset'](#) – the enemies-within who threaten to open the flood-gate of the danger zone into the safe, green world and provide a rationale for further policies with the potential to stifle dissent and social movement. Salvini called the incident with Sea Watch 3 ["a criminal act, an act of war"](#), and upon the release of Carola Rackete on 2nd July, he declared that the captain of the Sea Watch 3 vessel should be deported as she was ['dangerous for national security'](#). [A report](#) by Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum (ReSOMA) argues that the rise in criminalisation across Europe amidst the proliferation of hostile policy environments for activists and other concerned citizens impedes "the capacity of civil society to effectively and independently promote the fundamental rights of refugees and other migrants, and to uphold the EU's founding values, such as rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights' (Vosyliūtė and Conte 2019: 5).

We need anthropologists (amongst others) to critically face up to this emotionally charged politics of fear which endanger the lives of migrants and intimidate those who come forward to provide support despite the increasing risk of prosecution. Andersson's book offers important insights into the consequences of failed connectivity and is a powerful call for moving beyond a cartography of fear and danger in favour of 'renewed connections' (p6). While he is right to point out that anthropologists are yet to overcome 'a crisis of relevance' (p260), this book is certainly a firm step in the right direction.

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No Go World: How No Go Zones Make the World a More Dangerous Place

Anna Tuckett
October, 2019

As neo-nationalists gain strength across Europe and the promise of 'strong' borders continues to gain traction with electorates across the world, we need few reminders of the paradoxes of globalisation. In the present moment we live in a world of both blurred boundaries and hard walls. This simultaneous rigidity and flexibility which characterise the contemporary moment are, of course, not

contradictory but co-constitutive. Tracing the production of 'danger zones', '[No Go World](#)' explores these tensions and shows how at a time of ever-increasing possibility for global connectivity, disconnection and distance appear to be triumphing. Western military and aid interventions are increasingly conducted through remote and indirect means, while the borders of rich nations are closing in.

'No Go World' takes us to the red zones of the World Threat Map, to places our governments strongly advise us not to visit and where university bureaucracies refuse to clear new research.

> *The construction of 'no go zones', however, is not a benign process enacted by nation-states in order to protect their citizens but, as Andersson argues, an intensely political act that has multiple functions and outcomes.*

This book vividly traces how these processes play out, and in whose interests.

Much like Andersson's first book, 'Illegality Inc', 'No Go World' is not a traditional anthropological ethnography. Andersson aims to show the systemic way in which fear is shaping the world around us. His means of doing so is by conducting multi-sited research which draws on a range of interviews, military reports, maps, journalistic accounts and more traditional 'hanging out'. While this results in less in-depth and intimate portrayals of individual people, it allows Andersson to demonstrate the range of actors and organisations involved in the systemic production of fear and the connections between them. Like the best anthropological work, 'No Go World' elucidates the dynamic connections between micro, local processes and macro, global ones. It highlights how structure, agency and ideas all play important roles in shaping the world. In spite of his mobile roving ethnographic eye, Andersson's evocative writing ensures there is no shortage of memorable characters. That he also puts himself in the text not only increases the book's readability, but also acts as a useful reminder that we are all implicated in military, humanitarian and border interventions, and the justifications upon which they are based.

'No Go World' is divided into two parts. The first – The Story of the Map – is about the map of danger and its 'quest for control and separation' (18). It comprises chapters which highlight the processes through which particular areas of the world are being made to be distant and disconnected. In these chapters we move from Stockholm to Timbuktu, hearing from military heads of peacekeeping missions to seasoned aid workers, and reflect on the history of 'Mali's messy interventions' (50). Andersson's astute analysis highlights the consequences of risk-aversion tactics which turn the north of Mali into a 'no go zone' and ultimately produce more danger rather than less. The chapters in the second part – Contagion – illustrate the impossibility of the former undertaking, and show how, inevitably, 'the map's red and green zones bleed into one another' (141). Examining borders, migration, the aid industry and those who inhabit the 'no go zones,' these chapters highlight the circular nature of fear, risk and danger.

While 'No Go World' draws on insights from a range of disciplines, Andersson stays true to the anthropological project of illuminating that which lies beneath the surface through his minute tracking of the *consequences* of fighting 'danger' with distance. In recent years, the nature of military operations has significantly changed. Boots on the ground (or at least Western ones) have been replaced by remote controlled weapons and surveillance systems. As a result, security in these circumscribed danger zones has been outsourced to a booming private military industry, while there has been a huge surge in the market for drones and similar weapons. The consequences, as Andersson documents, are not only economic. Social as well as physical distances are created. In the absence of mass peace-keeping missions, local soldiers are trained and deployed to shoulder the dangerous work. It is not only these actors who undertake the 'risky and dirty tasks' (11) in the demarcated 'danger zones', but also local aid workers, mercenaries and freelancers. This creates a racialised division of labour which maps onto the former coloniser and colonised relationship.

Moving from on the ground effects to broader consequences, Andersson illuminates the 'performative power' of the mapping of danger which, as he writes, 'serves potent functions for both insurgents and Western interveners, who

wittingly or unwittingly collude in reinforcing the danger zone in its distance and strangeness' (82). The interests of multiple and divergent groups can be simultaneously met. Violent groups celebrate the mass withdrawal of tourism which inevitably ensures the creation of 'danger zones', as the connections between local populations and foreigners are severed. For Western states, meanwhile, the 'apolitical tool of travel advice' (81) can surreptitiously work to force cooperation on key political objectives with foreign governments.

The great strength of 'No Go Zone' is the way in which it effortlessly traverses from the local to the global, highlighting danger's systemic, rather than geographic, nature.

This goes to the heart of 'No Go World's' central argument: that danger and fear (its response) are self-reinforcing and circular, and that distance designed to contain danger actually makes the world more dangerous.

This argument is crystallised in Chapter Five – The Snake Merchants – which centres on the 'fear market.' 'In order to be rich, you have to threaten,' says Djibril, president of a Malian association for 'returnee' migrants. Djibril had been working on and off with development projects for several years but since 2012, when the conflict in Mali began, donors and Western NGOs have disappeared. Foreign money now came in response to potential dangers and Djibril's above comment highlights how development needed to be 'framed as a security concern' (177) in order to attract funding. Focusing on the aid industry, in this chapter Andersson shows how fear has become a marketable resource with 'jihadists, media outlets, smugglers, security forces, and repressive and democratic regimes all vying for different corners of the marketplace' (194). But, as he points out, the escalation of dangerisation has led to a self-reinforcing feedback loop that ultimately produces more danger and fear. While this chapter focuses on the aid industry, the concept of a self-reinforcing feedback loop reflects Andersson's broader argument. Danger zones are produced as dangerous by labelling them so. Distance does not produce safety but greater danger and fear and, as Andersson

illustrates, this can be in the interest – even if only in the short-term – of a diverse range of actors and groups from aid organisations to Western governments, jihadist fighters and many others. Conversely, therefore, while disconnection and distance are the main subject of this book, its central argument is about connectedness and circularity: 'the danger zone is not out there: it is already with us' (248).

Perhaps the most poignant aspect of the book is its illustration of the unequal nature of these connections and disconnections. The story of outsourcing and of a poorly paid and precariously employed workforce is one all too familiar in the contemporary neoliberal world. Local soldiers and aid workers, as well as the freelance journalists undertaking dangerous and poorly remunerated work, occupy the same structural position as sweat-shop and call-centre workers in the global south or precariously employed migrants in the global north. These different groups are connected through their shared position at the sharp end of global capitalism. Their situations are produced by the global flows and connections which characterise our contemporary world, but their circumstances reflect the way in which these flows do not run evenly, but rather become disrupted, blocked and impeded by the unequal mapping of power.

Ruben Andersson. 2019. No Go World How Fear Is Redrawing Our Maps and Infecting Our Politics. University of California Press.

Featured image by Raúl Nájera on Unsplash

Glimpses of Life in Indefinite Debt in the Czech Republic

Barbora Černušáková
October, 2019

"I can only work cash-in-hand [načerno] for the rest of my life," Nina[1] told me as we were sitting in her kitchen drinking black coffee while she was rolling cigarettes from tobacco purchased in half kilogram packages. Her partner Ivan had left for his afternoon shift at *Clean*, a municipality-owned company responsible for maintenance of public spaces in central Ostrava and the district of Údol. Nina was a 46-year old resident of Údol, a neighbourhood stigmatized as a "Gypsy ghetto", whose house I frequented between June and December 2016.

When I started visiting her house a few months into my fieldwork, our conversations evolved around my attempts to find odd jobs. Nina was very helpful in advising me where to look, and where to get the fit-for-work certificate and other required paperwork. She herself was unemployed. I sometimes tried to reciprocate by sharing job openings with her, until she one day matter-of-factly clarified that the size of her debts rendered any pursuit of formal employment pointless. Due to debt payroll deductions, her monthly income would be lower than what she received being on benefits and occasionally taking cash-in-hand jobs without a contract. She estimated that her debt instalments would come to about 9,000 CZK per month (313 GBP), depending on her gross wage, which would be around 12,000 to 20,000 CZK (417 to 696 GBP).

Nina was not entirely sure about the total amount she owed. During one of our first conversations regarding this issue, she said her debt was over 300,000 CZK (10,400 GBP). Later she told me she thought her debts were likely to be much higher, perhaps up to 1,000 000 CZK (35,000 GBP). They resulted from unpaid T-mobile bills, unpaid public transport fines, consumer credit, and loans from non-bank institutions.

> *Despite the stigma built around the trope of "excessive" spending by the Roma community and their supposed lack of consideration for the future, the pathways to indebted lives that I observed had little to do with culture and a lot with the operation of capital.*

The debt industry grew its own market with companies buying outstanding debts from lenders and enforcing debt claims inflated by additional fees. This practice continued despite an acknowledgment of the Czech Ministry of Interior in 2008 that companies buying and reclaiming consumer credit were poorly regulated and frequently enforced debt claims without court orders. Most of the debts claimed from my informants were handled by such intermediaries rather than by public authorities (in cases of arrears) or lenders (in cases of credit).

A significant source of debts among my informants were various forms of non-

payments: failures to pay transport fines; a failure to pay alimony after separation from a partner; non-payment for waste collection or utility bills; non-payment of compulsory health insurance during times of unemployment. Out of these, non-payments for waste collection became widespread after the city council stopped sending invoices and those who did not have a direct debit set up incurred arrears. The effect of these debts on lives such as Nina's are profound and long-term. Private bailiffs enforce debt claims from those who have income from wage labour but also from pensioners, women on maternity leave, or other persons on welfare benefits. For example, Nina said that six years ago her maternity leave, which was about 7,000 CZK (246 GBP), was reduced every month by 1,800 CZK (63 GBP) of her T-mobile debt repayments. At one point, she was no longer able to repay her debt and her outstanding bill plus interests and fines for late payment continued to grow. In addition, she had arrears on water bills from a period when she lived in council flat in Údol. A direct consequence of her situation, in which she was no longer able to repay the debts from arrears, is a life predicament of working cash-in-hand. To get by despite low and irregular income, Nina is forced to further borrowing: money from local loan sharks; and food purchasing on credit from the "Vietnamese" corner shop (*večerka*).

> The state or public authorities outsource enforcement of debt claims to private companies. This way the state becomes not only the entity responsible for the legal and policy framework for the debt industry but also its client.

A "promised land" for non-bank creditors?

When a family or an individual incurred unexpected expenses, or simply did not get by one month, they had to turn to credit. A solution that was supposed to be temporary turned permanent, and the deceptive advertising of non-bank institutions was a significant factor in this.

Observing the lives of indebted residents of Údol, I concluded that the operation of non-bank loans is characterized by fraud and the subsequent expropriation of racialized workers.[2] The experiences of my informants in Ostrava suggests that

the changes in the 1990s and the introduction of labour and housing markets produced vulnerabilities that affected Roma in a specific way. Their employment options have been increasingly confined to certain jobs such as domestic cleaning, street cleaning, waste recycling or construction. Due to discriminatory real estate practices, their chances to access housing was limited to racially segregated areas, often with reduced access to services, shops and leisure facilities. Their educational opportunities consist of "Roma-only" schools and schools following reduced educational programmes.

In this context, non-bank loans for Roma represent a post-socialist equivalent of [racialized hyper-expropriative "sub-prime" loans](), which financial markets pushed on African-Americans and other people of colour. Over the past 20 years, the Czech Republic, along with other "post-socialist" countries in the region have gained a reputation of "a promised land for non-bank consumer credit providers" (Kotous and Šimek, 2017). This was mainly thanks to minimal regulation of lending provided by financial institutions other than banks.

One of the features of the "non-bank loans" in the Czech Republic is that they offer loans without any collateral on a very high interest ranging from 20 to 300%. These loans are typically lower than 15,000 CZK (510 GBP) and are targeting clients on low income (Dotlačilová 2013). A relatively small credit taken from non-bank institutions (*nebankovní instituce*) can result in spiralling debt due to high interest. For example, Ivan borrowed 13,000 CZK (456 GBP) from SuperCredit several years ago and currently owes 150,000 CZK (5,259 GBP).

A number of my informants said formal debts were the main reason why it did not make sense for them to seek a job in one of Ostrava's industrial zones. One day in August, I was chatting to Robert, responsible for a crew of street cleaners employed through the Labour Office. In his early 20s, Robert said that he used to work in a "Korean company" in the industrial zone some years ago. His gross monthly salary of 17,000 CZK (595 GBP) was cut every month by 5,000 to 6,000 CZK (175 to 210 GBP) due to debt claims. So he left the job and started working in street cleaning, being on close to a minimum wage, but incurring lower debt

claim payments. This was due to the practice at *Clean* of keeping the debt payroll deductions *reasonable* so that workers do not end up below subsistence level and eventually leave. This practice changed some months after I left Ostrava, when the company increased the payroll deductions as requested by the law, which reduced some workers' incomes to the legal minimum of 6,178 CZK (216 GBP).

Due to hidden fees and rising interest, the actual debts by far exceed the amounts people borrow. Miss Teresa, an accountant at *Clean* explained to me that once there is a claim against a debtor, it includes *daily* interests. She was processing a payroll deduction of one worker against whom there was a debt claim of 20,000 CZK (700 GBP). The daily interest was 0.08%, i.e. 16 CZK (0.6 GBP). Since the debt in this case dated back to 2008, the interest increased the initial amount by 46,720 CZK (1,620 GBP), i.e. more than double the borrowed amount. In addition, a debtor has to pay also various "fees" associated with the repossession.

Julek had a secondary education and had worked for a moderate salary for over a decade. He grew up in an orphanage where he was exposed to the *gajo [*white*]* world, especially its cuisine. "I cook *gajo food, so many Gypsies like to visit me and taste it.*" Shortly after he left the orphanage in the 1990s, he became a victim of fraud. Somebody asked him to put his name under a fast loan application which he did upon agreement that he would get part of the money. "I may have seen up to 30,000 CZK (1,050 GBP) out the total amount." His debts have reached about 600,000 CZK (21,016 GBP) because he did not pay them back and the interest kept increasing the owed amount. His monthly income is cut every month due to debt-related payroll deductions, which render it fairly low. He lives in a dark dilapidated one-bedroom flat in a run-down neighbourhood.

Because the Czech legislation does not cap the maximum interest rate, predatory lending is lawful. Lenders are free to offer money on high credit and with high (often hidden) fees. Although the burden of personal debts and the operation of the "repossession industry" (*exekuce*) in the Czech Republic has been criticised by the media for some time, activists and politicians, the system continues to favour the lenders and aggressively squeezes the debtors.

Bible v Bailiffs

Bailiffs visited Nina quite frequently. I asked her how they behaved during those visits. Like "assholes" (*hovada*), she said curtly. "They shout and threaten us." One of the first things she stated in this conversation was that the bailiffs are white [*gádže].* "They find out the dates when we receive benefits and come." At one occasion, she would not let them in. The violent behaviour of bailiffs was also mentioned also during my conversation with Julek. He once accompanied bailiffs to a family in the neighbourhood of Údol. We both knew the family in question – they were Born-again Christians belonging to a group colloquially called 'Hallelujah'. During the visit of the bailiff accompanied by Julek, the family members presented a Bible and started preaching to them to distract them from the purpose of the visit. "Good that I went to that visit," noted Julek, otherwise he said the bailiffs would have used unnecessary force.

The experience with debt of Nina, Julek and others illustrates how home has become a new "[frontier of accumulation](#)" in a post-socialist city.

At the core of it is the ability of capital to extract profit from very low-income Roma households. What makes the transfer of wealth from the social margins to the core through the mechanism of debt possible is the state. Its legislation and policies create a framework in which indebted individuals and families become almost defenseless vis-à-vis the barely regulated operation of financial capital. In addition to this, the state also becomes a *client* of capital in the form of companies that claim debts from arrears on public services.

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[1] All given names and place names are withheld to protect the privacy of the people I met during my research.

[2] I am pursuing Fraser's argument that racialized Roma workers are not merely exploited but are "expropriated subjects", the cornerstone of "the dwindling ranks of protected exploited citizen-workers" (2016: 176).

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Reflections on Performance Ethnography and Public Engagement #Report

Tess Altman
October, 2019

You would have been forgiven for doing a double take if you walked past UCL Anthropology's Darryl Forde Seminar Room on Monday 10 June, 2019. Breaking with established seminar culture—orderly rows of chairs, focused audience trained on a lone speaker—a cacophony of squawks, mews and hisses issued from a menagerie.

16 workshop participants crawled, flew or slithered to rhythmic music accompanying facial expressions from the sombre to the absurd.

Graduate students and academics from UCL, Oxford, LSE, Exeter, Kent, Canterbury, Queen Mary, Royal College of Art, Cambridge, Goldsmiths and the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) were taking part in a performance ethnography workshop I organised in association with my reading group "Political and Moral Economies of Voluntarism", led by theatre practitioner Tom Bailey of Mechanimal Theatre Company. The workshop was oriented at an introductory level for anthropologists to allow exploration with theatre techniques and collaborative methods, guided by an experienced theatre practitioner.

The idea was conceived after I saw the panel "Anthropology and the Matter of Whiteness" at the 2017 American Anthropological Association Conference. Panelists riffed interactive, intertwined narratives back and forth in a style reminiscent of spoken-word. Watching this lively, collaborative performance was a radical change from the other panels I attended. The standard presentation formula seemed to flatten dynamic, nuanced ethnography. It could also potentially be alienating for non-anthropologists. Could experimental and

collaborative performances such as these mitigate the flattening effect, and provide a channel for anthropological public engagement?

Inspired, along with fellow UCL PhD students Victoria Tecca, Sabine de Graaf and Ioanna Manoussaki-Adamopoulou and discussant Ruth Mandel, we experimented at the 2018 Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development Conference in our panel "Humanitarianism/s within and outside the state: A collaborative ethnographic story."

We spliced fieldsites in Australia, Greece and France into one single "script" performed together. Playing characters in other fieldsites, we learned about the intention and emotion of one another's research participants, engaging deeply with each other's work.

As this [Allegra Lab thread](#) attests, performance is a topic of increasing interest within anthropology. There is already a rich tradition of considering the relationship between performance and anthropology at UCL, with a reading group and research lab founded by Martin Holbraad and others such as Kelly Robinson and Dan Sherer. Interest and expertise was clear in the level of experience people brought to the workshop: many had performed auto-ethnographic plays, co-produced plays with research participants, and used audio-visual techniques. Participant Sinibaldo De Rosa (Exeter) shared that since the 1980s, performance ethnography became an established field at the intersection of anthropology and performance studies after figures such as Johannes Fabian, Dwight Conquergood, and Soyini Madison drew attention to the self-reflective, intersubjective and embodied learning processes at work in the construction of ethnographic knowledge. As a theory, method and critical cultural praxis, performance ethnography opened avenues to challenge engrained understandings of knowledge production.

We observed how performance informed a new way of co-producing knowledge over the course of the workshop. Tom Bailey introduced us to theatrical skills such as storytelling through scene-setting, emotion, gesture, humour, and surprise; ensemble work, speaking as a "Greek chorus"; character, impersonating an animal and enacting its personality; improvisation; and physical techniques such as flocking (moving as a pack), mirroring, and balancing space.

We then applied these skills to our own "fieldwork script" based off dialogue, a vignette or scenario. Participants combined their scripts with others in a collaborative performance for an informal showcase. This led to hybrid yet surprisingly coherent scenes, covering diverse topics: the anthropologist's gaze, the burial of a migrant who died at sea, live action gaming role-play juxtaposed with oral history war narratives, luck-giving rituals and learning how to drive an

automated car, the right way to cook a pig stew and the provision of humanitarian aid. Each performance involved intensive group work and highlighted different techniques learned, such as soundscapes, narrative, physicality, gesture and objects.

The final group discussion brought the focus back to anthropology. What did performance ethnography add to the discipline? Did the attempt to re-enact dialogue or elements of research participants' identities raise new questions around the politics of representation?

Olivia Barnett-Naghshineh (Goldsmiths) noted that a key strength of performing ethnography was the creation of a narrative that was easy to follow and relatable for the audience, which could have a humanising and equalising effect. Aleena Chia (University of Jyväskylä) cautioned that sometimes this format could simplify a narrative to the detriment of the ethnographic complexity anthropologists strive to retain, but also introduced new possibilities in an "economy of attention," foregrounding parts of ethnography that were not easy to convey through text such as silences, non-dialogic communication, or material objects. Valentina Zagaria (LSE) spoke of the immediacy of public response she received performing ethnographic political street theatre, and how it strengthened ethical engagement through a real-time feedback loop from her research participants. The anthropological responsibility not to reinforce stereotypes by boiling research participants down to caricatures was also raised as an important point to consider.

Many wanted to see another workshop organised, and the development of a collaborative network of performance anthropologists. The utility of performance ethnography as a pedagogical tool was also raised, with some suggesting it could be useful for teaching undergraduate students or part of a research curriculum for graduate students.

What this workshop drove home to me was that performance ethnography can be a means of changing anthropological knowledge production to be more collaborative and reflexive, involving a process of working on—and thinking through—our ethnography together. It can also involve a broad range of people in this process, adding to its effectiveness as a form of public engagement. The affective, relational and collaborative qualities of performance ethnography can foreground subaltern voices, present sensitive topics in broadly relatable ways, and allow for co-production with research participants.

Performance ethnography can also potentially make anthropology more politically engaged. As Alex Flynn and Jonas Tinius note (2015, 3), political performances move people—they cause them to reflect, and interact with the world in a different manner. Through performance ethnography, we can perhaps

communicate anthropological accounts and showcase alternative ways of living and being in the world, in an accessible way that resonates with a wider audience.
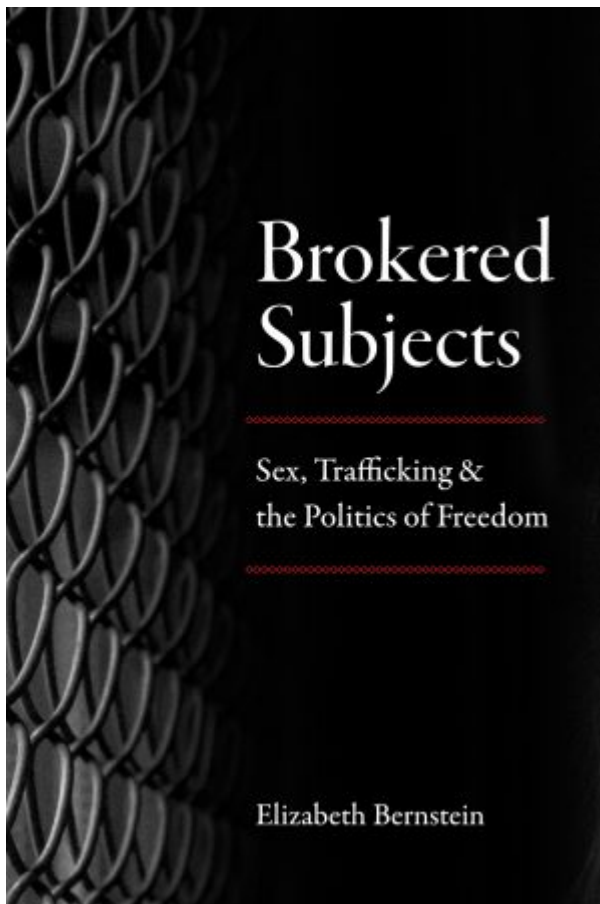
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Feature [image](#) by [PIRO4D](#) (Courtesy of [Pixabay](#))

Brokered Subjects: Sex, Trafficking, and the Politics of Freedom #Interview

Elizabeth Bernstein
October, 2019

The topic of sex trafficking captured the imagination of the public for already a few decades. Despite the definition of trafficking being rather blurry, fighting against trafficking is frequently understood as a noble and worthy cause. In her new book, *Brokered Subjects*, Elizabeth Bernstein explores the assumptions behind the narrative of human trafficking.

She shows how our current understanding of trafficking is shaped by a combination of rather conservative sexual politics, militarized humanitarianism, and redemptive capitalism.

In this interview, Elizabeth Bernstein discusses how she became interested in the topic of trafficking and how the narrative of trafficking shapes and is shaped by the dichotomy of slavery and freedom.

Dafna Rachok: You start the book by mentioning a "human trafficking tour" organized by a coalition of Thai and US NGOs. Then, in one of the chapters you zoom in and look closer at this one and other similar tours. What prompted you to start looking at the "trafficking industrial complex," as you call it, in the first place? And how and why did you decide to connect the discussion of the "trafficking industrial complex" to

the new generation of Evangelicals?

Elizabeth Bernstein: I started looking at trafficking because I encountered some of these issues when I was doing research for my prior book, *Temporarily Yours*,[1] which was on sexual commerce and globalization. I was doing research for that book in the mid- to late 1990s. And when I started the book, nobody was talking about trafficking, but by the time I was finishing the book, suddenly I was hearing a lot about it. There was this whole new framework that was emerging. There were meetings at the UN and there were rumors that the United States will introduce something new legislatively, which would later become Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). And though everybody was talking about this new framework, nobody really knew what it would do and how you can get on board and make it better. Moreover, people were wary of it because of the memories about the white slavery discourse.

So, I was finishing the other book and thinking whether I need to start another one. I wrote about trafficking a bit in the Introduction and Conclusion to *Temporarily Yours*, and then I thought that I would do a research project on trafficking because it was very interesting. So, I decided to talk about the discourse of trafficking, because the discourse is not just the way of talking about things, but it also includes laws, policies, resources, and the whole institutional apparatus that was gathering steam. Just in the final years, when I was finishing that other project and doing my research with sex workers, nobody was talking about sex trafficking in those terms. And as we know from Foucault and other thinkers, how we talk about things matters. And particularly in this case, there were ample political and financial resources that were being rerouted to this reimagination of what the problem of trafficking consisted of, what the causes were and so forth. So, I got curious.

And regarding the Evangelicals, I got to it empirically, in a sense. Because I was looking also at who was pushing this framework further, and there was a number of articles in the press that mentioned that strange bedfellows – feminists and Evangelicals – are working together again. So, as I researched the issue of

trafficking, I met a lot of Evangelicals, and to my own surprise, they turned out to be quite different from what I expected. I was expecting very right-wing people, the antiabortion activists, for example, and it wasn't those Evangelicals. Turned out that yes, it was Evangelicals who pushed forward the issue of trafficking, but they are a very different group than I imagined them to be. So that was very interesting and instructive for me, also in terms of thinking about the current coalition of Evangelicals with feminists versus past coalitions.

Dafna Rachok: You did the majority of your research for the book before SESTA/FOSTA (Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act/Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act).[2] If you conducted the research in the wake of SESTA/FOSTA or after it was passed, would it reshape your optics?

Elizabeth Bernstein: I don't think that it would change the analysis very much. It changes the analysis in the first book a little bit. The first book is about sex workers who live off the street going online and indoors, and SESTA/FOSTA is potentially going to reverse all of that. But we will see. It hasn't been here long enough to see what it's actually going to do, but it certainly threatens to do that, and people are worried about that. Certainly, SESTA/FOSTA is extremely relevant to the argument that I make in *Temporarily Yours* and to the dynamics that I'm describing. But in terms of *Brokered Subjects*, I think we don't know yet what it actually is going to do. It makes sense that SESTA/FOSTA emerged when it did in this climate. But I am a person who thinks empirically: so, let's see what it is going to do. I have talked to some sex workers and they are not happy about it and are trying to work around it. But in terms of the broader effects and to what extent it reshapes the landscape of sexual commerce now, we'll have to see. It is too early to know that.

Dafna Rachok: In the chapter detailing the human trafficking tour and the people who bought the tour, you mention that the tourists often dismissed the authority of people who contradicted their pre-established beliefs about the prevalence of human trafficking and how the victim of trafficking looks like. I was wondering whether you think this

phenomenon is at all connected with the phenomenon of an increasing importance of someone's point of view, even if this point of view contradicts established facts (a phenomenon we saw with alternative facts, for instance)?

Elizabeth Bernstein: I think that is true, but I also think that there are certain sources of authority, nonetheless. As a lot of the tourists who embarked upon this tour got their knowledge about human trafficking from some source, such as the movies. And the so-called experts on the tour were reinforcing that. Thus, I think that it wasn't just some skepticism of experts, as I was also on the tour, I was a different kind of expert and they were skeptical of me because I'm a sort of pointy-headed academic. I think that when the experts reinforce a felt sense of something that you know and want to be true, then they are given credence. And when they run afoul of that or in a different direction, then they are treated with skepticism. So, it's not a wholehearted dismissal of experts. It's a selective embrace of what they have to say about what you feel is true.

Dafna Rachok: In the book, you offer an incredibly insightful discussion about redemption through capitalism: that corporations often become main stakeholders in the human trafficking discourse and then actively promote the use of technologies that they can offer to curb human trafficking.

Do you see this as a feature of contemporary capitalism that needs affects and calls to morality in order to sustain and possibly to legitimize itself?

Elizabeth Bernstein: I think that's well put. And I also think back now to the discussion of SESTA/FOSTA. I think I would probably rewrite the chapter about the redemptive capitalism if I were writing it now. Not because of SESTA/FOSTA per se, but because of the fact that the companies like Facebook have taken such a hit: they were trying to present themselves as benign. Not even as just benign, but rather as sources of salvation for the problem. And I think that the broader

trend has continued. What I'm calling redemptive capitalism, we continue to see this trend. And we see it not only around trafficking, but around so many other issues as well. Given some sorts of opposition to Trump, there are a lot of people who are trying to get corporations to use some sort of capitalism as a buffer against political structures that they don't like. I think that persists. And I think that whether or not it is the issue of trafficking or other issues, it is certainly an ascendant way that corporations, especially large and dangerous ones, justify themselves. Especially post 2008, when there is a lot more critique and more concern than there had been previously.

Dafna Rachok: I find the subtitle of your book very interesting. The subtitle is "Sex, Trafficking, and the Politics of Freedom". However, you don't talk a lot about freedom in the book: rather, you show the emergence of this new gender politics and in part challenge some ideas about the "progress" made in this sphere. Why did you decide to talk about "politics of freedom" in the subtitle?

Elizabeth Bernstein: I talked about it a little, but it is more implicit rather than explicit and it is mostly in the Introduction. And then in Chapter 6. Intellectually, I am in dialogue with Julia O'Connell Davidson:[3] about the rhetoric of slavery and that if we want to understand what slavery is, we then must have some idea of what freedom is. Because if we are talking about slavery, freedom is its purported opposite. So, I'm trying to suggest that the implicit model of freedom, as evident from many of the anti-trafficking campaigns, is one which situates freedom within contemporary capitalist market relations without much of a critique or an interrogation of those. And that is a vision that I find somewhat suspect based on both theoretical and political implications. But largely, my empirical work for this project and the one before, was about figuring out how the people concerned understand freedom and understand their choices: how people get into this mess, as often other options that are available on the table and also not free.

So, one of the things that I'm trying to do is to challenge the presumed neat dichotomies between slavery and freedom, exploitation and not exploitation.

I am also trying to challenge the presumptive sites of freedom, which in the imagination of global anti-trafficking campaigns (particularly those which originate in the US) are the criminal justice system and the capitalist market. And I think that these are not the right places to look for meaningful versions of freedom.

Dafna Rachok: Your overall argument is about the emergence of a new domesticated politics of sex and gender, and how this new gender politics are mediated by neoliberalism and supported by some feminists. How come did human trafficking become an issue situated at the intersections of all these topics?

Elizabeth Bernstein: Here is another thing now – the #MeToo movement – that has really picked up much more since I finished writing the book: I alluded to it in the very final footnote of the book, but other than that I don't mention it because when it was happening, the book was already written. So, I think with any of these issues you need to have a perfect storm, so that things could coalesce. And the storm, at the very beginning, could be caused by a totally different issue. I suggest this in the Introduction and then again in the Conclusion that #MeToo is doing some of this work now and that trafficking is sort of being pushed to the side a little bit. But I think that partially this is happening because other things about the political movement have changed to a certain extent. Between the late 1990s and, say, 2016 there was antiglobalization anxiety: a sort of response to neoliberalism, as well as a certain configuration of sex and gender politics that was operating within that milieu, the rise of humanitarianism and so forth. I think through the Bush and Obama presidencies: people were concerned about globalization and global flows of markets and people. Trump is concerned about borders and global flows too. He also talks about trafficking, as he did in his most recent State of the Union address. So, I think that you need to have this sort of storm. And this is the broader argument of the book that these issues don't emerge simply by virtue of the specific features of the issue itself, but they have to connect with other things that are happening in the broader global social, political, and economic field. And only then they can ignite, like it happened with

trafficking. But again, I think that trafficking has been slightly eclipsed, it has been getting less attention in the US, as I write in the Afterword, because of everything that has happened particularly since 2016.

So, it makes sense that #MeToo is the issue now that goes with this new configuration, because #MeToo is less transnational and less global, it is more insular.

It is a sort of analogue of Donald Trump-centric global politics: everybody is sort of inward looking now, though I think that this situation was different in the preceding decades.

[1] Bernstein, Elizabeth, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

[2] SESTA is an abbreviation for the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act; whereas FOSTA stands for the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act. Commonly referred to as SESTA/FOSTA, they became law on April 11, 2018.

[3] O'Connell Davidson, Julia, *Prostitution, Power and Freedom.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999; O'Connell Davidson, Julia, *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom.* Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

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