The Egyptian Red Crescent in the Twentieth Century

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The Egyptian Red Crescent was founded in 1912 by Sheikh Ali Yussuf with a clear Panislamic and anticolonial agenda.

In the following decades, however, the organization turned more secular and pro-Western, without giving up its Muslim roots and pro-independence aspirations. It was deeply influenced by local traditions of charity and philanthropy, and yet sought to connect to international humanitarian structures and standards,

struggling for autonomy from the successive Egyptian governments. This contribution explores why founders and members of the Egyptian Red Crescent oriented towards international collaboration and which role religion in general and Islam in particular played in this process. Testing different theoretical frameworks this article follows the Egyptian Red Crescent's history in the twentieth century, taking into account the impact of colonialism, nationalism and decolonization.

In much research on humanitarianism the International Committee of the Red Cross, founded in 1863, is generally considered the prototype of a Christian-inspired, Western humanitarian organisation (Forsythe 2005, 27-28). While this view is legitimate in many respects two points should be added: first, for a long time non-Western and in particular Muslim Red Cross and Red Crescent societies did not receive sufficient attention in research on the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movement. This only changed in the 1990s with the pioneering work of Jonathan Benthall and others (Benthall 2003). Second, this movement has played an important role in respective Muslim societies and considerably influenced the Swiss members of the movement. This is also true for the Egyptian Red Crescent.

Muslim and Secular – Founding of The Egyptian Red Crescent and its Religious and Political Philosophies

After the Ottoman Red Crescent, founded in 1869, the Egyptian Red Crescent was the second Muslim and first Arab Red Crescent society within the movement. While the Ottoman Red Crescent's foundation happened mainly due to an International Red Cross initiative, the Egyptian Red Crescent was founded solely based on an Egyptian initiative. Its establishment in 1912 is even more surprising as the founder, Shaykh Aly Yussif, was a Pan-Islamic, anticolonial newspaper

publisher with close connections to the Egyptian viceroy, Abbas Hilmi II. The initial reason for the Egyptian Red Crescent's foundation was the Italo-Turkish War in Libya in 1911/1912. The Egyptian Red Crescent was meant to support the 'Ottoman brothers' and Muslim soldiers in their fight against the colonial invader. Thus, in this first phase of the Egyptian Red Crescent, humanitarian aid was often provided with reference to Islam as uniting donors and beneficiaries. It shared this feature with other charitable associations founded at the same time, such as, for instance, the Mubarrat Muhammad Aly.

In a second phase, the Egyptian Red Crescent turned towards Western and secular ideas. This was mainly due to its members who came from wealthy Egyptian land owners with close connections to the royal family. Many of the Red Crescent's presidents were surgeons at the famous hospital Qasr al-Ayni and professors of the Faculty of Medicine in Cairo. Such a Western and secular orientation can also be observed with regard to the women of the Egyptian Red Crescent, the association's most active members. Many of them were educated at foreign, mainly French schools in Egypt and wore Western clothes. However, this did not mean that they were in favour of the British occupation of Egypt. On the contrary they defended the country's independence. I would even argue that in the period of Egyptian nation-building under colonial domination, the Egyptian Red Crescent – often in close connection with the Egyptian governments – used humanitarian aid as an argument and means to turn Egypt's reduced sovereignty into full sovereignty (Jackson 1993).

The majority of the members of the Egyptian Red Crescent were Muslims although some Christians and even Jews took part in the association. Yet, in the historical archive on the Egyptian Red Crescent religion rarely appears as a point of legitimacy. In newspaper articles on the association we sometimes find references to Islam, for example when during the Second World War donations were requested for the support of Muslims in Yugoslavia. Otherwise, the central term used to legitimise the work of the Egyptian Red Cross was 'humanitarianism', *insāniyya* in Arabic (Moussa 2014). Nonetheless, Islam remained an important parameter of the Egyptian Red Crescent's engagement.

During Ramadan, the association organised special collections of donations and their distribution to people in need. Moreover, the Egyptian Red Crescent assisted pilgrims on their way to Mecca and supported the Rif population of Morocco in the Rif War in the mid-1920s and the Ethiopians in the Abbyssinian War in 1936.

> *Thus for the Egyptian Red Crescent Islam can be considered as much a political and cultural identity as a religious one.*

Humanitarian Aid as a tool for National(ist) and International(ist) Geopolitics

Strategies focusing on political power were an important part of the activities of the Egyptian Red Crescent. These strategies occurred on the national, regional and international level. On the national level the Egyptian Red Crescent was, as many other Red Cross or Crescent societies, closely connected to the Egyptian government. Nonetheless, I suggest that the Egyptian Red Crescent also influenced the Egyptian government and its social and health policies. For instance, after the first Israel-Palestine-War in 1948, the Egyptian ministry of social affairs established a Higher Committee for Palestinian refugees which included two female delegates of the Egyptian Red Crescent. Based on their support for humanitarian concerns, these women became part of state structures that were otherwise completely male-dominated. On the regional level, the political rivalry between Egypt and Saudi-Arabia was translated through humanitarian aid (Amar 2012).

In this context, the example of the Regional Federation of Arab Red Cross and Red Crescent societies is revealing. Launched in the early 1960s, the Egyptian Red Crescent was both central to and absent from this endeavour: while it expressed interest in heading the federation and in convening meetings in Cairo

this engagement never materialized, and finally, in 1975, the permanent Secretariat of the Federation was established in Jeddah financed by the Saudi government. Finally, the Egyptian Red Crescent fostered close links between regional and international humanitarian engagement. For instance, supporting the Palestinian refugees' right to return and to their own nation-state at International Red Cross Conferences, the Red Crescent used the international arena for its postcolonial concern.

In periods of crucial political change the Egyptian Red Crescent played an important role for the nascent Egyptian nation-state. While Islam was referred to mainly in the organisation's beginnings, it remained a central parameter that shaped the Egyptian Red Crescent's discourses and practices on the national level. On the regional level, the question of Arab solidarity was more important, especially under the regime of Nasser who perceived himself (and was at times perceived) the leader of the Arab world. On the international level finally, the Egyptian Red Crescent stressed its Arab and Muslim connections, but also used this arena to present Egypt as a sovereign country.

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A Postcolonial Civic? Shi'i Philanthropy and the Making and Marking of Urban Space in Mumbai

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Scholarly discussions of charity, philanthropy and humanitarianism in varied contexts tend to uphold the moral ideal of giving for the sake of humanity at large or the common good. However, in practice all forms of giving tend to belie the ideal altruistic motive and are communitarian in nature, often characterized by what I call ‘nested hierarchies’. Through ethnography of Muslim philanthropy in Mumbai, I suggest that communitarian philanthropy especially in violent neocolonial majoritarian democracies can be interpreted as a *political ethic* through a critical postcolonial discussion of minorities and difference.

A long tradition of communitarian philanthropy dating back to the colonial period has shaped the city of Mumbai both materially and socially. While the contributions of the Parsi community to the civic form and life of the city are well known, the philanthropic role played by Muslim mercantile communities – Khojas,

Bohras, Memons – have not received adequate attention in academic scholarship. Of Gujarati origin, these communities started migrating to Bombay from the mid-nineteenth century onwards and settled in distinct quarters in the old city that the British rendered opaque as the 'native town'. A hub of intense commercial activity linked with Indian Ocean networks to east Africa and beyond, the cosmopolitan character of the old city was steadily eviscerated in postcolonial India despite its continuing importance to commerce in Mumbai.

> *Dilapidation borne from the structural discrimination of Muslims, growing migration of relatively poorer Muslims from north India, property laws such as the Bombay Rents Act combined with infamous linkages with the underworld served as a backdrop to the stigmatized, colloquial designation of this part of Mumbai as 'mini-Pakistan' following the 1992-93 communal riots.*

Traditions of religious charity and philanthropy by Muslims in the making of the city have been lost in consequent political representations. Nor have they been included in analyses of the different ways in which citizenship has been reconstituted in the context of what Appadurai (2002, 24) terms "state redundancy" in his discussion of the role played by non-state groups and multinational agencies in civic governance in Mumbai.

Philanthropy in the Built Environment

The visual, built form of neighborhood quarters in the "native town" that have historically been home to various Shi'a Muslim communities led me to explore and attempt an excavation of the contributions of Muslim philanthropy to the urban common good in Mumbai and attendant political economies. These range from everyday architectures such as the ubiquitous water taps installed through acts of individual charity to gain merit through sacred commemorations of thirst at the battle of Karbala to formalized institutions of care such as orphanages, hospitals, schools that primarily serve Shi'i communities but are in principle open

to all. Prominent examples of the latter include the Prince Aly Khan, Saifi and Habib hospitals, Habib School, Khoja Girls Orphanage, and the various Jamaatkhanas (gathering space of the community), which work for the welfare of their specific denominations, whilst simultaneously contributing to the larger common good in the city. The Ismaili Jamaatkhana, for instance, is a grand structure with a clock tower that stands out in the hustle and congestion of the surrounding alleys in Dongri. The clock tower is a replica of colonial architecture and a hallmark of similar towers in other cities in the subcontinent of colonial reformist efforts directed at the natives, to instill in them the value of punctuality. It also reflects the modernizing discourses of the Ismaili community in Bombay to over time discard overtly Islamic symbols in their quest to present and experience themselves as a modern community.

While philanthropic initiatives of the colonial era are concentrated in the 'old town', post-colonial segregation and ghettoization has prompted a diversification of the philanthropic portfolio of civic initiatives in suburbs to which Muslims migrated after 1992-93 or came to be settled by newer migrants from other parts of the country. Shi'i philanthropy now supports housing blocks, schools for modern education, tuition classes, youth camps and Islamist initiatives such as religious study circles and libraries that seek to project Shi'i Muslims as peaceful, responsible citizens within the wider city while simultaneously bolstering confidence in their own sense of identity. Thus, in an increasingly fractured context, philanthropy is also being directed at *marking* a place for various Muslim communities in the city. This marking has taken place along denominational lines – Ismailis, Twelver Khojas, Bohras – that have historically been engaged in competitive discourses of modernization.

My ethnographic work has focused in particular on the Khojas, who control some of the major private Shi'i charitable trusts, which have become the principle mechanism for routing religious charity. This reflects a general shift from waqf to individual donations to private charitable trusts. Starting with the Charitable Endowments Act, 1890, discussions of 'general public utility' dominated Indian jurisprudence on the meaning of charity through the twentieth century. Ritu

Birla's (2018) work traces the oscillations in legal precedents on the question of charity and profit since then. From a strict separation in the late 19th century, the link between charity and profit is now enshrined in law through a distinction between the *purpose* of a Trust and the *means* used to fulfill that purpose. The gradual shift from waqf being the principal foundation of Muslim philanthropy to that of the charitable trust had already started during the colonial period. The early nineteenth century archive is rife with disputes over inheritance that partially underlined this shift. However, it was in the postcolonial period that diversification in the charitable portfolios of trusts became more explicit and evident. This shift charts the transition from the significant contributions of Shi'i Muslim philanthropy in the making of colonial Bombay to postcolonial anxieties and imperatives of needing to mark their place in the city. Especially after the 1992-1993 communal riots, Muslims in Mumbai, not only have to navigate an intangible culture of suspicion but also real, material marginalization. Over time and especially after 1992-93 private charitable trusts have proliferated in Mumbai.

Shi'i trusts are funded by the profits of business, individual donations and *khums*, an obligatory tithe in addition to zakat that is incumbent on all Shi'as. This embeds local charity and philanthropy in both transnational mercantile and religious networks. A wide range of institutions in Mumbai ranging from private charitable trusts to community organizations (Jamaats) to hospitals have gained permission to collect khums in the name of the Imam, whose spiritual authority is represented in the figure of various senior ayatollahs in west Asia. The system of getting permission to collect khums has systematized, bureaucratized and enlarged the scope of Islamic philanthropy at local levels. Take for example, the initiatives of a prominent Twelver Khoja Trust called the Aliman Charitable Trust. It is an umbrella for a number of different trusts working for Twelver Shi'i welfare in the city. Its chairman, a prominent Khoja Shi'a businessman, is the 'financial wakil' of Ayatollah Sistani. The Trust is linked to a madrasa called Najafi House that has historically been patronized by the transnational networks of Ayatollah Khoi and his successor Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq as well as the Khoja Ithna

Ashariya Jamaat. Today it is an important philanthropic entity that works in both religious and civic realms.

The ‘Nested Hierarchy’ of Urban Charity

Govandi is a massive slum in eastern Mumbai built on and adjacent to the Deonar landfill. Some of the poorest Shi‘i communities, most of whom are migrants from north India who barely eke out a survival in the smog enclosed rubbish dump that is their home. They therefore seek out charity dispensed by the Khoja community. The Jafari English High School and Junior College in Govandi is one such initiative of the Aliman Charitable Trust. It was started in 1985 to provide education to “underprivileged children” whose parents could not afford fees in the English medium convent schools.

One day I got chatting with a woman called Parveena from Govandi. Her husband was a rickshaw driver in the city. According to her Najafi House used to provide free education earlier but they had to now to pay half of the monthly fees (in 2013). She mentioned that Sunni and Hindu children also study in the school but full fees are charged from non-Shias. Another woman from Uttar Pradesh, living in Govandi, referred to Najafi House as “*garibon kee company*” (the company of the poor). She seemed less frustrated than Parveena and explained how they had to fill in a form at Najafi House to apply for concessions for fees and books. Here we have a ubiquitous example of communitarian philanthropy wherein the School is open to all communities but children from the Shi‘i community are subsidized. Fees paid by non-Shi’i and non-Muslim students thus subsidized the school while at the same time giving them a precious opportunity to study in English.

A nested hierarchy thus characterizes institutionalized communitarian philanthropy. The imperatives for giving to one’s own community first are sharpened in the context of the steady marginalization of Muslims. Besides modern education, Shi‘i philanthropy in areas outside the old city also supports

housing blocks. Many Muslims accused of violence in the 1992-93 riots migrated from the old city to a suburb called Mombra that falls under a different police jurisdiction. Though it is environmentally less on the edges of bare survival, Muslims living in Mombra also struggle with poverty and especially housing. Unlike the residents of Dongri who continue to pay very low, nominal rents due to the Bombay Rent Control Act, affordable housing is a huge problem in other areas. The lady who referred to Najafi House as the "company of the poor", also told me that Najafi House had helped many people with housing too.

Rethinking Philanthropy in Post-Colonial Spaces

Much of the scholarship on humanitarianism focuses on relief during emergencies and reconstruction in the aftermath. This does not speak to contexts not defined as 'emergency' in international human rights and other protocols. How do we conceptualize 'humanitarianism' (if that is an appropriate umbrella term at all) in cases of the steady deterioration of living conditions resulting from the discrimination of minorities by the state? I suggest that the work of religious charitable trusts is another example of "philanthropic governmentality" for it fulfills some of the civic responsibilities abdicated by the state. Much like corporate social responsibility initiatives, trusts that dispense charity to religious communities also "return to an ethos of customary social welfare practices directed not at the abstract public of citizens, but rather in cultivating local communities" (Birla 2018, 157). They dispense charity for the general common good in theory but are communitarian in practice.

> *I argue that such communitarianism could be seen not only as an obligation and duty but a political ethic in a divisive postcolonial context. How can we think of philanthropy and the urban common good in post-colonies marked by violent forms of neocolonial majoritarian democracies?*

I draw upon Leela Gandhi's (2011) discussion of the "pauper's gift" to rethink the

ethical values associated with humanitarianism from a postcolonial perspective. She argues that post-colonialism has been denied the possibility to "think" the commons on account of the multitude of groups and subgroups "each insisting on the right to assert its specific way of life and/or culture" in much of western liberal thought. Gandhi asserts that even some radical Euro-American theorists are critical of postcolonial studies through their thrust on concepts such as universalism. However, universalism has a long colonial history. Leela Gandhi suggests turning to the anti-colonial archive for it is here that the "common is engaged not only as the scene of resource sharing and the redistribution of sovereignty but also as the labour of inhabiting the hard ground of one's communization or unexceptionality" (ibid., 32). Therefore, we need to turn to a different notion of the commons that can be found in the work of anti-colonial thinkers such as Gandhi, who recognized the fundamental diversity of communal and social life and argued for the radical co-existence of different groups.

Recognition of difference, I suggest, both acknowledges and necessitates attending to the "needs of the oppressed", who are the minorities in post-colonial India. From this perspective, giving to one's own seems to be more *ethically* transparent for it makes explicit the structural conditions that continue to exacerbate widespread poverty and marginalization of certain minorities. It also makes explicit the wider geopolitics within which communities get implicated fostering a competition to project the becoming of modern, non-threatening subjects of the nation-state within minorities. While this is a continuation of inter-community dynamics of competitive modernization with origins in the colonial period, this dynamic is inflected by postcolonial marginalization and stigmatization. This deepens the nested hierarchies within communitarian giving.

Recognition of difference also legitimizes the desire of minorities to remain as such where difference (communitarian identity) becomes the very ground for citizenship. From this perspective of post-colonial ethics, discussions of Muslim humanitarianism need not be trapped in the secular vs. religious dichotomy that even critics of western universalist assumptions underlying humanitarianism tend to lapse into. This happens when Muslim philanthropy is exceptionalized through

an (over) emphasis on its soteriological aspects or subsumed under “secular humanitarianism” in discussions of accountability, servicing “this-wordly” needs, or specifying worthy recipients (e.g. Redfield and Bornstein 2010).

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At Odds with the Impulse: Muslim Humanitarianism and its

Exclusions in Northern Pakistan

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Drawing on fieldwork undertaken between 2004 and 2013 in Gilgit Town, the multi-sectarian capital of the Gilgit-Baltistan region of northern Pakistan, this brief explores how, even while they work under the aegis of a "avowedly

nondenominational" (Miller 2015: 4; see Khan 2010: 66), "non-communal" (AKRSP 1990: 3) Muslim humanitarianism that professes to uplift and protect insaaniyat – or, humanity itself – philanthropic actors can sometimes engage instead in practices that differentiate and exclude prospective beneficiaries on the basis of sect.

Since 1982, Muslim humanitarianism in Gilgit-Baltistan has taken the principle form of the Aga Khan Development Network – or, AKDN – and its multiple agency auspices. Helmed programmatically, politically, and spiritually from its Swiss and later French headquarters His Highness Prince Aga Khan – or, the *Hazir Imam* as he is known to his followers, members of the Nizari Isma'ili Shi'i branch of Islam – the AKDN's track record in Gilgit-Baltistan is one of incredible initial fortunes, though these gave way to a more diminished project by the mid-2000s.

Through the medium of microfinance and agriculture entities such as the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), the Aga Khan Education Services' (AKES) schools and teacher training, and the Aga Khan Health Services' (AKHS) clinics, hospitals, and health outreach, AKDN implemented a broad-array of infrastructural and community-based development projects. The story of its agencies' prodigious outputs in Gilgit-Baltistan serves as a commendable and much-touted example of the power of Aga Khan and his *Imamat*, or community of believers, to harness Ismaili faith and sociality as a means to spark and sustain change, and re-craft local communities in ways that were recognizably more "modern" and "civilized": literate, economically productive, and socially and politically empowered.

From their outset, AKDN agencies capitalized on and scripted into their humanitarian operations a broad array of the uniquely Ismaili "moral, meanings, obligations and sentiments" (Miller 2015: 34) cherished by its Ismaili beneficiaries, including a sect-specific communitarian ethos. These gestures helped AKDN's agencies to localize and render familiar the otherwise-global

humanitarian principles and ethics imagined to more closely hold local-level development actors' and beneficiaries' to their mandates, and better actualize Gilgit-Baltistan's Ismailis' simultaneously-"spiritual and material development" (Miller 2015: 34).

> *In the interests of ensuring equity and peace between Ismailis, Shias, and Sunnis, and fulfilling the AKDN's secular and pluralistic mandate, its operational boundaries were early on expanded to include non-Ismailis as development partners.*

However, informed as its agencies were first with Ismaili and only then more "generally Islamic concepts" (Miller 2015: 4), AKDN's humanitarianism was experienced by enrolled and prospective beneficiaries as "inseparably entwined with [Ismailis'] spiritual and moral aspirations" (Ibid), and "explicitly" rather than implicitly religious (see Miller 2015: 4). Rather than acknowledge the distinctively Ismaili "moral logics" inherent to its interventions, or the "real and potential exclusions" these and the singularly "special relationship between Isma'ilis and the AKDN" (Miller 2015: 4-5) gave rise, many AKDN employees, the majority of whom were Ismailis, affirmed "pluralism [as] a central pillar of AKDN's ethical framework" (AKDN 2014a in Mostowlansky 2016: 233).

In Gilgit-Baltistan, though, pluralism was not necessarily reflected by the social and spatial distribution of AKDN agencies' initiatives, with Ismaili communities' boundaries repeated in and reflected by, interventions' contouring and emplacement (Manetta and Steinberg n.d.: 21; World Bank 2002, Wood 2006). Nor was pluralism always reflected by the content and tenor of its inter-sectarian humanitarian engagements. Sunnis especially were rarely included as administrators and decision-makers, and AKDN's programmatic consultations with Sunni and Shia Village Organization (VO) members were infrequent, when Shia and especially Sunni VOs existed at all. External evaluations found AKDN mobilization drives focused less on Shia and Sunni communities, meaning their specific and sometimes uniquely different development needs and ambitions often

went unaddressed (see McGuinness et al, 2010).

Agencies' employees explained Shias and Sunnis' comparatively diminished presence as being because they were "poorly receptive" and even "antagonistic" to AKDN's developmentalist and humanitarian outreach. Having witnessed such realities during my employment with AKRSP in 1998, I knew these claims held true, but only to a degree. Indeed, in my subsequent research, AKDN's assertions were contested by the majority of my Sunni and Shia interlocutors, who self-described as "eager" and even "desperate" for the chance to participate in and avail themselves of the benefits of, AKDN interventions, and contradicted by Sunnis and Shias' community-based efforts to petition its agencies for coverage, some of which I had been party to.

> *My ethnography found Sunnis and Shias' estrangements not simply yielded by community-side "suspicion", "rejection" (Settle 2012: 392), or "hostility". Nor were they only the result of organizational "blind spots" (2014), as Salmaan Keshavjee qualifies the Aga Khan Foundation's operational oversights and community-level inattentions in other parts of Central Asia.*

Sunni and Shia interlocutors described their under-inclusion or bypassing by AKDN agencies as evidence, too, of something more deliberate: of 'biases' (see Settle 2012: 394) and neglect (see Settle 2010: 25) that, when put into practice and exchange, were at-distinct odds with AKDN's professed humanitarian impulse. Their claims were corroborated by the fact that, in my interviews with them, a number of AKDN personnel's initial declarations that their work was fuelled by an apolitical, secular, and non-sectarian altruism (Settle 2010: 23, 32) gave way to sectarian, political, and sometimes-wholly prejudicial assessments of the Shia and Sunni 'others' in their midst, and, as my brief explores, Sunnis perhaps most of all (see Ali and Akhunzada 2015: 15, Hunzai 2013: 8).

The distance between Sunnis and Ismailis was attributed as much to cultural and ethnic as religious differences, with Sunnis sharing far less Islamic doctrinal interpretation, systems of leadership, and ritual practices in common with Ismailis

than Shias. Moreover, AKDN personnel worked, then as now, against the backdrop of internecine discord and violence. While Shia-Sunnis enmities have been significantly greater, many Ismailis described also experiencing discrimination and sometimes violence, which informed some of their concerns for and less laudatory opinions about Sunnis, even if Shias could be equivalently responsible for such acts. My brief seeks not to negate AKDN agencies' innumerable strengths and achievements, but unsettle their claims concerning the persons theorized as being their prospective beneficiaries, yet who appeared infrequently if at all as part of their operations.

Gilgit Medical Center

By way of a focus on the Aga Khan Health Services, my brief offers vignettes of the ways 'at-odds' impulses were structurally embedded, affective, and quotidian; swept into humanitarian exchanges, and helping to explain agencies' results. In discussing the ways that sectarianism could be imbricated with AKHS's on-the-ground workings, I foreground the ways that many Sunnis, on whom the majority of my research since 2004 has focused, came to be estranged from the low-to medium-cost Gilgit Medical Center, the 50-bed facility that until 2014 served as AKHS's regional headquarters and its flagship hospital. My work at the hospital was the result of a larger ethnographic project, which explored how Shia-Sunni hostilities contributed to Sunnis' marginalization from Gilgit Town's government hospitals, located as they were in Shia enclaves, and led to the worsening of their already-high morbidity and mortality ratios (see Varley 2010, 2016). Unable to safely access public sector facilities during Shia-Sunni strife, the Gilgit Medical Center was a clinically more effective and imaginably more 'neutral alternative'.

By contrast to its proponents' claims that the hospital was universally accessible, and posted notifications at the facility that "political talk" was proscribed, a considerable number of Sunni interlocutors' relayed how, in the course of seeking and receiving care, they felt they had been discriminated against by Ismaili staff, as it took the form of comments intended to earmark Sunnis' less desirable

differences from Ismailis, and not-always subtle forms of maltreatment meted out by Ismaili patients and attendants; with some abuses witnessed but not also intervened upon by attending staff. In sharing the stories of their time at the hospital, maternity patients spoke of the ways that the care they had received often compared unfavorably against the attention shown to Ismailis; in so doing, Sunnis confirmed the power of poor handling, perceived or actual, to drive them away from the hospital and its services. Sunnis' sometimes-strident or disruptive efforts to protest or pushback against what they felt were the prejudicial conditions of care risked being recast as evidence of their "difficult nature". (To this end, many Sunni interlocutors admitted that, worried for the possibility of mistreatment, they could be over-reactive, defensive, and unduly provocative.) One nurse relayed how, "Sunnis are more closed-minded, and they are 'pushier'. They ask a lot of questions and interfere."

> *In ways that inadvertently corroborated Sunnis' claims of differential treatment, a number of AKHS interlocutors shared their concerns for the "challenges" posed by Sunni patients on the one hand, and the Sunni community's "incapacity" and "extremism" on the other.*

Common to many accounts were assertions that Sunnis were inherently "backwards". In my work in the Outpatient Ward, poorer women's bodily condition, and impaired obstetric health especially, were often conveyed as being metaphoric for the Sunni body politic overall. One administrator went further; proposing that Sunnis' "incivility" and "wickedness" could be chalked up to "genetic" causes and was, therefore, unmanageable and inescapable. They argued that these more 'intractable' qualities confirmed Sunnis' poor suitability both as development partners and recipients of its largesse, insofar as it had been theoretically extended to them. In advancing these claims, many personnel raised the specter of 'tribal violence' in neighbouring Diamer District and Khyber-Pakthunkhwa Province, and the sometimes spectacular acts of violence Sunni militants in these areas had inflicted, including the mass killings in 2011 and 2012 of Shias traveling south to Islamabad. When pressed, some eventually

acknowledged that their broad-brush approaches invoked extremisms that had little to no bearing on the behaviour of Sunni patients coming from within Gilgit Town, the vast majority of whom shared Ismailis' concerns for the dangers posed by tribalism and fanaticism in other regions of Gilgit-Baltistan, or themselves had fled radicalism and strife in those districts, and were socially and economically more alike the hospital's Ismaili employees and patients than different.

When asked why Sunnis comprised the smallest percentage of the hospital's in-town patients, a number of employees denied the possibility that sectarianism at the facility contributed to Sunni patients' choosing other hospitals. Instead, Sunnis' under-use of the hospital was attributed to their "lack of awareness" about its services. However, Sunni interlocutors were universally knowledgeable about the Gilgit Medical Center, and many expressed a deep appreciation for its healthcare providers' expertise, and safer, higher quality treatments they provided. Personnel also referred to Sunnis' "religious zealotry", and their animosities for Ismailis and the Aga Khan in particular, about which they were not far wrong. However, theirs was a disdain expressed less for Ismailis' religious beliefs and practices than the instrumentalization of AKDN agencies for "political" rather than only philanthropic purposes, and their discontent with an Ismaili-identified humanitarianism that professed care for all, yet under-engaged Sunnis, who were already poorly supported at governmental and non-governmental levels. AKHS's operations across Gilgit-Baltistan, for instance, served a predominantly Ismaili and Shia patient base.

In making sense of their marginalization, Sunni interlocutors hypothesized that AKDN and its agents were able to preserve humanitarianism's symbolic capital and material largesse for 'their own', and, in so doing, facilitate Ismailis' collective uplift in socio-economic and political terms all. They pointed out how the "advancement" and "progress" engendered by nearly forty years of concentrated humanitarianism yielded definitively political advantages and capital.

A more educated, prosperous, and healthier Ismaili body politic was not only

better positioned to emplace its agents and advocates in more political terrain, including in the region's public sector. It was also better equipped to pursue and defend its own interests. Humanitarian exclusions were also broadly understood – not only by Sunnis, but also a number of Shia and Ismaili interlocutors – as enabling Ismailis to distinguish themselves from and compete against, their Sunni and Shia "sister communities", and gain leverage over Gilgit-Baltistan's key resources. With their efforts concentrated in Ismaili communities, AKDN agencies achieved a dramatic but also selective uplift that was left largely unchallenged by its donors, and significant upticks in its beneficiaries' social welfare and health indicators. The AKHS's successes in Ismaili communities, though, have yielded health disparities and, by relation, resentments of such a magnitude that many interlocutors hypothesized they may have helped fuel inter-sectarian enmities and conflict.

In reporting to donors and stakeholders, AKDN agencies typically emphasized either the success of their pluralistic efforts, or, in explaining and legitimating uneven inclusion, relied on explanations that foregrounded Sunnis and Shias' disinterest or intransigence. In such tellings, it was not that that Sunnis and Shias were discouraged or denied, but, rather, that they themselves rejected the development equation. No matter the rhetoric, disconnect between what AKDN's agencies reported, and what the communities within their operational reach experienced, was not entirely unnoticed. Several external evaluations, including two by the World Bank (1995, 2002; McGuinness et al, 2010; see also Miller 2015), confirmed the challenges AKDN faced initially establishing traction with more conservative Sunni and Shia communities. Conversely, they also established Shias and Sunnis' willingness and ability to join interventions, and, in so doing, generated evidences that destabilized AKDN narratives and helped fill in their gaps.

Conclusion

Even though AKDN agencies such as AKHS were configured and publicly relayed as projects intended for and available to all, a substantial number of Sunni interlocutors characterized their operations as sources and mechanisms of tacit sectarian distancing and exclusion. As I found, not all exclusions were achieved through inequitable distributions or denials; at the Gilgit Medical Center, they were made possible, too, through the affective quality of care. Rather than sectarian preferences and prejudices being separable from the humanitarian project, my interlocutors revealed them as entangled with the formulation and execution of humanitarianism itself, with Sunnis' marginalization revealing AKDN as an undeniably utopic but also sect-specific visioning of regional development and community welfare.

It wasn't entirely surprising, then, that so many Sunni interlocutors experienced AKDN agencies' day-to-day operations and outreach to non-Ismailis in particular, as politically fraught and morally bifurcated; marked by the tension between the universalizing and inclusive nature of its humanitarian mandate, and the particularizing and exclusionary goals of the persons tasked with seeing it through. For them, humanitarianism emerged as internally animated by inconsistencies in its agents' pursuit of orthodoxy and orthopraxy – or, right belief versus right practice (Goguen and Bolten 2017) – such as it took the form of discrepancies between humanitarian actors' professed goal to support all irrespective of sect, and their sometimes more restrained or limited commitment to fulfill the same.

Through ethnography that attends to those at humanitarianism's distal edges, we gain insights into the ways that interventions can be experienced not as uniformly benevolent, but prejudicial and neglectful. Such a focus helps us better apprehend humanitarianism's inconsistencies, insofar as on-the-ground practices can deviate from institutional ethics, and its incoherence from the perspective of those who believe in pluralistic mandates, but find themselves rebuffed or sidelined because of their difference. Nested within ostensibly ethical

humanitarian projects, other kinds of impulses may be at-work; in exploring them, anthropologists encounter humanitarianism' alter ego, such as it can consist of less humane and less reported – or, easily reportable – engagements. In using ethnography to counter and unsettle organizational scripts, we bring light to humanitarianism's shadowside, insofar as every humanitarian agency possesses one, and as it is experienced by the persons technically within its reach, yet who remain worlds away from its benefits.

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Islam, Humanitarianism and everyday religion

Filippo Osella
July, 2019

In this intervention I argue that charitable or humanitarian practices among contemporary Muslims— and everyday religiosity more generally—are constituted and experienced not only through differences and contestations between different Islamic traditions/theologies, but also as the outcome of engagements and encounters with non-Muslim Others, whether religious, ethnic, secular or political, both locally and globally. Drawing inspiration from critical culture theory, and responding to the late Shahab Ahmed's call for an expansive and open-ended exploration of historical practices of meaning-making within Islam, I propose an understanding of Muslim charitable and humanitarian practices located at the interstices of the routinized practices of the everyday and the inevitably open-ended fluidity of daily life.

In late August 2018, the state of Kerala on the south-west shores of India was

ravaged by strong monsoon storms, resulting in extensive floods, destruction of houses and infrastructures, and more than 400 deaths due to landslides or drowning in flood waters up to 15 feet high. In the midst of such a catastrophic event, the local population started spontaneously the rescue and relief efforts, well before the eventual arrival of the state's rescue services. During the following days, whilst the sizeable Keralite diaspora begun to pour cash into the Chief Minister Flood Relief Fund, the media reported countless instances of individual heroism and humanitarian generosity, from fishers taking inland their flat-bottomed outboard power boats to the rescue of more than 25,000 stranded villagers, to Hindu temples, Muslim mosques and Christian churches opening their doors to offer shelter and a place of worship to fellow villagers or neighbours of a different faith.

At the forefront of this ostensibly popular mobilization in the face of disaster stood Kerala youths, such as college and university students who made up a substantial percentage of the volunteers who responded to the call of political, religious and social organizations to join in a three-days long cleaning of mud-filled houses in the paddy-growing area of Kuttanad in southern Kerala.

> *Celebrated in the media as the expression of a regained deep-rooted tradition of communal harmony, pluralism and popular participation, such a rhetoric of amity and tolerance might contain a degree of wishful thinking.*

Whilst faith-based organizations and charities were routinely accused of favouring their own community, across Kuttanad one could see the placards and flags of various youth organizations. From the Communist Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) and the Student Federation of India (SFI), to the RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), the Jamaat-e-Islami's Students Islamic Organisation of India (SIO) and the Sunni Students' Federation (SSF) these organizations participated in the relief efforts, and amity and tensions between activists from these different groups surfaced with equal ease.

The state of Kerala is normally seen to have remained sheltered from the waves of

communal violence which in the last 30 years have accompanied the radicalization of Indian politics along ethico-religious line. However, in recent years Kerala publics have been interrogating themselves on the shape and direction of everyday inter-community relations in the face of an apparent erosion of a historical "tradition" of communal tolerance. Underpinned by ideals of secular modernity and progressive politics this "tradition" has been the state's hallmark since independence. These debates have multiple sources and shades, embedded as they are in the social position and political inclinations of various publics and counterpublics animating a state whose Hindu majority population lives alongside substantial Christian and Muslim communities – respectively approximately 18% and 27% – whose roots stretch back to the beginning of Christianity and Islam in West Asia. These ethnic-religious communities are heterogeneous and contingent social formations – internally fragmented into (formerly largely endogamous) hierarchically related status groups, shot through by a complex configuration of religious affiliations, class positions, overlapping political allegiances and local histories. Their self-awareness as exclusive "communities" took novel and specific connotations at the interstices of wider transformations engendered by Portuguese conquest, British colonialism, early 20th century socio-religious reformism, and post-independence nationalist developmentalism.

> *It is this complex historical entanglement between communities-in-the-making, local, trans-local and global religious networks which has constituted the historical terrain for the making of Kerala Muslims' modalities of religiosity and which has shaped their status as "Muslims" in Kerala and in the framework of global modernity.*

In this context, humanitarian practices, and everyday religiosity among contemporary Muslims are constituted and experienced not only through differences and contestations between different Islamic traditions, but are also the outcome of engagements and encounters with non-Muslim Others, whether religious, ethnic, secular or political, both locally and globally. In arguing so, I am

taking issue with two trends in the study of religiosity/religion within and beyond anthropology which have overdetermined discussions about Islamic charity and humanitarianism.

The first has gathered strength on the back of Giorgio Agamben's attempts in the *Homo Sacer* project to sketch a history of (western and modern) biopolitics via a genealogy of Christian theology and sacred history. Indeed, Agamben's encyclopaedic work has stimulated a renewed interest in the theo-politics and theo-economics ostensibly underpinning the history and institutions of Western modernity (state, government and market). I have in mind a body of excellent studies, such as Dotan Leshem's (2016) *The Origins of Neoliberalism* (2016), Devin Singh's (2018) *Divine Currency*, Elettra Stimilli's (2016) *The Debt of the Living* and the more recent *Debt and Guilt* (2018), as well as the 2017 translation in French (with an introduction of Thomas Piketty) of Giacomo Todeschini's *I mercanti e il tempio*" (*Les Marchands et le Temple* 2017*)*.

These studies explore ways through which economic language and categories of classical thought were taken up in early Christianity as the basis of a new theology. This, in turn, provided Church and Christian sovereigns with the means to develop a conceptual and practical apparatus – a *dispositif*, in Foucault's terms – for economic and state administration, thus setting the basis for modern (and ostensibly secular) economic or political thought and practice. This extremely stimulating body of work not only emphasises the centrality of religious charity in the constitution of medieval or early modern economies and polities, but also underscores continuities between Christian charity, modern humanitarianism and state welfarism. However, rich as it is in theological insights, this body of work lacks of historical subjects: who are the subjects of the state in such a theo-politics, or the economic subjects of these theo-economics, we might ask? The institutions and practices of Western modernity emerge as an epiphenomenon of a subject-less theology.

> *Yet equally troubling to me is that this is a self-referential theology, solely focused on (European) Christianity, utterly impermeable to the historical*

circulation of ideas and practices across different polities and continents engendered, for instance, by trade, conquest or colonialism.

More generally, such an implausible parthenogenetic understanding of theology has allowed many scholars (in anthropology and beyond) to focus single-handedly on one religious tradition or another, with such traditions improbably represented as deriving from self-contained theologies (e.g. the much cited work of Saba Mahmood, and of those who have followed in her steps).

The second target of my critique are those scholars who, by rejecting the privileged position often ascribed to scholarly/scriptural religion, replace the fetishism of theology with an equally improbable fetishism of practice. Predictably, this approach has had a degree of popularity in anthropology, a discipline traditionally preoccupied with the performativity of the everyday. And yet it received a substantial boost in recent years through the work of the historian Robert Orsi and his followers. Concerned "with what people do with religious idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them" (Orsi 2002: 172), he deploys the notion of "lived religion or everyday religion" to understand how religiosity and spirituality are experienced and expressed by ordinary people in the context of their daily lives. Here religion and religiosity have meaning only in relation to how people actually live, the domain of actual experiences of religious subjects which is distinguished from the prescribed religion of institutionally-defined beliefs and practices (see also McGuire 2008; Sullivan 2012). The latter, with their theologies and institutions, are thought as a fetter to the expression of popular religiosity which, instead, emerges from and speaks to deep-rooted embodied cultural orientations. The ghost of Geertz's "religion as culture" is obvious in Orsi's theorization of "everyday or lived religion", and as such it resonates with many an anthropological study of religiosity in post-colonial context. Popular religiosity is normally endowed with the power to subvert the doctrinal boundaries of organized religion, enmeshed in an economy of affects ostensibly shared across social bodies, as in Anand Taneja's recent ethnography of encounters with *jinns* in

Old Delhi (2017), or Erica Bornstein's (2012) study of everyday humanitarianism in the same city.

We are also told by anthropologists like Susan Bayly and David Mosse, or sociologist of religion such as Caroline Dempsey and Selva Raj that popular Islam and Christianity in South India – the cult of Christian and Muslim saints, in particular – are necessarily localized and hybrid in that they are embedded in culturally-specific orientations. Unsurprisingly, then, we find that in South Asia as elsewhere, much ethnographic work on everyday Muslim religiosity focuses on *sufi*-inspired forms of Islam, celebrating them as tolerant, plural, and authentic, against a much maligned Other of salafist Islam (for a critique, see Osella and Osella 2008). The latter is understood to embody practices which are either alien to the majority of South Asian Muslims, or altogether external to South Asian traditions, regarded as a threat to what are argued to be culturally specific forms of South Asian popular Islam. A recurrent theme in these studies is a putative opposition between sufism's syncretism or hybridity, or what is more generally claimed as sufism's cultural sensitivity and pluralism positioned against what are characterized as the essentialist and dogmatic logics of so-called scripturalist Islam. Such a Manichean approach explores connections between different religious traditions by recovering a demotic, almost spontaneous religiosity, but also naïvely conjures up a representation of "popular Islam" in which the latter exists and reproduces itself via devotional practices and traditions bereft of theological underpinnings.

> *To move beyond the analytical inadequacies of the fetishism of theology and the fetishism of practice, I suggest drawing on critical culture theory to gain a different understanding of everyday religion which locates religiosity within the wider—and thus political and contested—field of cultural production.*

I propose an understanding of "everyday lived religion" which neither resuscitates improbable oppositions between textual Islam and popular religiosity, nor attributes authenticity and legitimacy to different or competing

traditions of Islamic orthopraxis, but develops an analytics of their coming to being via intersectional exchanges and practices.

Drawing inspiration from Henry Lefebvre's (1988) critique of the everyday, and responding to the late Shahab Ahmed's (2016) call for an expansive and open-ended exploration of historical practices of meaning-making within Islam, I locate "lived religion" at the interstices of the routinized practices of the everyday. This entails a focus on the embodiment of specific dispositions via habituation, the deployment of technologies of self-crafting, *and* the inevitably open-ended fluidity of daily life. Thus, on the one hand, lived religion can be conceptualized as the discursive (and contested) terrain of moral reasoning whereby multiple and inchoate ways of sensing, knowing, being and doing might be shaped as commonsense (Gramsci 1997), acquiring coherence and substance through the performative effects of the cumulative interventions of a heterogeneous assemblage of (human and non-human) actors. On the other hand, if the banalization of Islam as "familiar, unquestioned, everyday religious practice" (Harriss et al. 2017: 18) whether in Kerala or elsewhere might underscore the emergence of quasi-hegemonic modalities of religiosity, the notion of lived religiosity also reveals what Williams (1977: 121) calls the residual and emergent, i.e. "the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance."

I do not wish to reduce "religion" to "culture", but find it important to draw from critical cultural theory to conceptualize residual and emergent forms of religiosity as simultaneously contained within (and thus constitutive of) hegemonic or dominant modalities of religiosity. At the same time, they exceed the latter both as traces of multiple ("religious" and "secular") discursive traditions, and as expressive of "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationships [which] are continually created" (Williams 125; see also Ahmed 2016). The notion of lived religion points us towards appreciating the historical and contemporary circulation of practices, aesthetics and theologies not only within and between religious traditions, but also across different social fields, as explored with great success in Soares and Marsden's ethnographies.

Instead of attempting to establish lines of causation between social fields, I want to stress—in time-honoured anthropological fashion—the contingent historical milieus in which particular modalities of moral reasoning develop. At the current historical juncture in which transformations of Islamic religious practice continue to be represented and misread—in academic writings and popular discourse as much as in the imagination of Muslims and non-Muslims alike— as determined primarily by theological debates or textual traditions, it is increasingly important, and indeed urgent to trace the articulation of Islamic discursive traditions within the broader social, cultural, political and economic environments in which they are debated and gain wider plausibility. This, in turn, should open the way to explore also the orientations and practices of those Muslims who imagine their ethical lives alongside or outside the confines of Islamic orthodoxy and who participate to the constitution of Muslim publics and identities, but whose voices, as Shahab Ahmed has argued, have been obscured in much contemporary studies of Muslim societies.

To conclude, then, I would argue that by focusing on the contingent and necessarily open-ended production of the everyday, we can appreciate the emergence of (novel) subjectivities which remain always incomplete and in the process of becoming. From this perspective, it might be unsurprising that Kerala's Muslim youths can be simultaneously at the forefront of fashion and radical political activism, or can participate with equal vigour to ethics of piety or those of secular humanitarianism. They can claim both their particularity as Muslims, or participate in the making of contemporary Kerala youth cultures at large.

> *In other words, rather than positing somewhat fixed Muslim or Islamic identities and subjectivities, the focus is on historical processes of becoming Muslim in all their complexities, tensions and contradictions.*

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Muslim Humanitarianism: An Afterword

Julie Billaud
July, 2019

What kind of practices, forms of moral reasoning and ethical orientation does Muslim humanitarianism entail? In what contexts and in response to what social problems does it arise? Is the expression even appropriate to describe socially and culturally embedded forms of compassion and benevolence?

As Benthall argues in this series of posts, there is no direct equivalent to 'humanitarianism' in Arabic even though the term *al-insāniya* expresses a similar

idea of ‘humanism’. But thinking of Muslim humanitarianism as a “problem space” or a conceptual-ideological ensemble, as Till Mostowlansky suggests in his introduction, offers interesting possibilities for studying forms of aid, welfare and care that derail artificial boundaries established between charity, development and humanitarianism.

It is with this objective in mind that the authors of this thematic thread explore case studies of philanthropic, charitable and solidarity projects, which brought together, provide us with a mirror image of more hegemonic forms of humanitarianism, embedded within the North Western protestant tradition. Brought together, these case studies disrupt the dominant categories of thought mobilised to describe humanitarianism.

What emerges is a picture of humanitarianism drawn from the perspective of its “margins” or rather from the perspective of its alter ego, where surprising assemblages of actors, practices and ethical inclinations collide and compete against each other in an attempt to realize a distinct version of “the good”.

This mirror image challenges dominant representations of humanitarianism as a primarily Western, secular, universal and apolitical enterprise grounded on principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality: a mythical representation that always fail to reflect the empirical reality of practices observed “on the ground”.

In this sense, Muslim humanitarianism appears as neither less biased even when it is explicit about its religious roots nor more inclusive in its goal to serve the disenfranchised. Through the case of AKDN health care programs in Gilgit, Pakistan, introduced by Emma Varley, for example, we see that Muslim humanitarianism presents the same exclusionary dynamics and forms of “triage” that exist in its Western version.

An ethical dilemma which then emerges for the researcher is: How to articulate such a critique without reinforcing the perception that Western humanitarianism would be the only credible form of principled engagement with the suffering of others? How to account for such local forms of exclusions while remaining equally

concerned with the power imbalances and ideological hegemonies that cut across the field of humanitarianism at the global level?

The place of Islam in Muslim humanitarianism

Islam provides an ethical framework for action but a framework that is also reconfigured as a result of its encounter with other normative and moral principles available in Muslims' direct environment. Islam informs actors' moral sentiments, but such sentiments are not all encompassing or fixed but rather subject to constant negotiation and contestation. What Filippo Osella, drawing inspiration from critical culture theory, calls "l'islam mondain" or "everyday Islam" provides interesting theoretical avenues for considering the moral universe of Muslim humanitarians less as a reflection of norms imposed by religious institutions than the product of cultural interactions and ordinary forms of sociability. Indeed, observing Muslims' lived religion through the prism of their "humanitarian" practices enables us to trace how their moral reasoning becomes "commonsense" as a result of the "contemporary circulation of practices, aesthetics and theologies not only within and between religious traditions, but also across different social fields" (Osella).

These dynamics are particularly noticeable in the contexts of Saudi Arabia, Northern India and Kerala where processes of borrowing and circulation enable intersectional exchanges, provide opportunities for collective practices and reconfigure the ritual of zakat toward the achievement of development goals and poverty alleviation (Taylor).

Derbal argues, for instance, that Saudi humanitarianism is often demonized for its supposed religious indoctrination and the spread of an intolerant and misogynist version of Islam. These orientalist representations contradict the fact that far from being a monolithic project controlled by a hegemonic state, Saudi humanitarianism entails numerous actors, from private donors to individual

members of the royal family. Derbal's research in the charity sector also highlights a wide range of practices, from traditional almsgiving and food banks to sophisticated training programs, medical facilities and rehabilitation centers. Some of these programs follow the model of social entrepreneurship in the name of greater efficiency instead of more classic forms of religious giving.

In the case of Lucknow in North India, Zakat charities reinvent the meaning of zakat, moving away from a focus on the purification of the giver toward a focus on long-term vocational development, social solidarity and the establishment of a system of wealth redistribution. These charities and the volunteers who run them revisit Islamic scriptures and embrace the managerial ethos of development so as to make Islamic prescriptions respond to the specific needs of their communities. The bureaucratization of zakat via this unique form of "obligated voluntarism" does not involve the abandonment of a pious inclination, Taylor argues, but on the contrary, goes hand in hand with spiritual revival.

Hence Muslim humanitarianism opens up a space of conversation around what giving should be about, what *waqf* or charitable foundations should look like and whom they should serve in priority.

The international, the national, the transnational and the post-colonial

This series also highlights the complex relationships between the local, the international, the transnational and the postcolonial. Humanitarianism is sometimes mobilized strategically to achieve other goals than those it explicitly pretends to have as ultimate target. In the case of the Egyptian Red Crescent, humanitarianism was initially embedded within a pan-Islamic anticolonial movement and was mobilized as a means to claim national sovereignty and independence. Interestingly, the inclusion of the Crescent within the Red Cross movement also transformed the public image of the ICRC, increasing its

legitimacy when engaging in negotiations with Islamic political interlocutors such as Hamas and Hezbollah.

In the case of Shi'i philanthropy in Mumbai, humanitarianism acts as a "weapon of the weak", a "theatre of collective empowerment" to use Leela Gandhi's expression, i.e as a means to resist marginalization. Communitarian philanthropy is an "ethics of survival" which enables Muslims to circumvent State attempts at erasing Islam's presence in public by re-inscribing it in the urban landscape. Defining the sphere of Shi'i philanthropy in Mumbai as a "postcolonial civic", Gupta demonstrates how such charities seek to fulfil some of the civic responsibilities abdicated by the state in a divisive postcolonial context.

Finally, in the transnational space of Islamic charities Basit Kareem Iqbal studied in Jordan, Muslim humanitarians establish equivalence between the discursive tradition of Islam, notably Islamic law and international humanitarian law, to articulate a form moral reasoning based on righteousness and repair that can provide guidance for humanitarian action. This moral economy challenges the normative secular basis of international humanitarianism, reconfigures the relationship between the beneficiary and the benefactor and offers opportunities for a different kind of moral economy, one with the potential to overcome the limitations of disenchanted modernity embodied in international humanitarianism. Drawing inspiration from Charles Hirshkind's theorization of the deliberative space created via the circulation of cassette-sermons in Cairo, Iqbal defines this form of humanitarianism as an "Islamic counter-public".

Pure altruism vs self-interest

Thinking about Muslim humanitarianism invites us to further reflect on the meaning of 'giving' as an activity that is not necessarily driven by pure altruistic sentiments and that may involve a certain degree of self-interest. Indeed, giving is a fundamentally ambiguous practice that creates hierarchy between the giver and

the receiver, and that triggers some level of dependence. If Islam does not see any fundamental contradiction between giving and self-interest, Western humanitarianism is built on the myth of pure altruistic compassion. A potentially interesting future agenda of research could involve tracing the religious genealogy of such a moral sentiment and observing how it is reconfigured when Muslims claim humanitarianism for themselves.

Feature Image by Mihai Surdu (courtesy of Unsplash)

Where are the Nuba queens?

Siri Lamoureaux
July, 2019

The Sudanese revolution had slowly been gaining recognition since December 2018, when, in April 2019, a photo of women's activism pushed the protests into the international spotlight. This now iconic image has become the most recognized symbol of the revolution, having been circulated and reproduced as murals, digital memes, on Twitter and Instagram, as well as on billboards. Sudanese protestors call these women *Kandaka*, Nubian Queens, referring to the female monarchs of Meroe in the Kingdom of Kush (260 AD – 320 BC) in today's

Upper Egypt/northern Sudan, who at times ruled independently and led armies.

Modern Sudanese often refer to Nubia to assert the glory of their African past, a history that long predated the arrival of Arabs in the 7th century. But Nubia is where today's Arab-Muslim socioeconomic elite claim to originate, and the Nile Valley today remains the power centre of Sudan. Kandaka, however, have become a rallying cry against those very elite who control the government since 1989, a regime using Islam to justify oppressive policies, not least are those which compromise women's rights to sexual and reproductive well-being. These modern Kandaka are now claiming justice for decades of misogynist policies and offences. The young protestor in the image above is chanting "They imprisoned us in the name of Islam, they burned us in the name of Islam, killed us in the name of Islam". In these protests, women vocally claim for justice, transformation, truth and reparations. Women also held the White Robe (*towb*) march, to denounce the loss of Sudan's innocence under the denounced president Omar El Bashir's military regime. They highlight misogynistic policies inscribed in the Public Order Law which requires women to "dress modestly", cover their hair, wear long skirts, and not to loiter in public spaces with men.

In parallel, a Facebook group known as *Minbar Chat* exploded in membership. It was originally a group run by women to expose sexual harassment or adultery by men. Pictures of abusers were posted alongside their families, to shame them publicly and to warn other women. This group has now transformed into a powerful tool against the abuses of the regime – photos of military, police or security personnel who inflict (sexual) violence against women are circulated, commented on and used to expose and denounce these so-called "protectors". As was explicit in the mass rapes carried out against protestors on June 3, 2019, outspoken activists are frequent victims of sexual violence by security forces.

As is known, mass rape was/is prominent in the Darfur conflict, the rationale being that violating the female body also violates the opposing group as a whole (Hale 2015). But Sudan's culture of sexual and gender-based violence is not only a part of warfare, refugee camps and protests. It is part of misogynistic thinking at

multiple levels, entrenched in communities, the legal, healthcare and protection services but linked to national and international biopolitics and Salafi ideology (Lamoureaux 2018).

> *It is in effect a state-supported attempt to control public morality, exercised on women's bodies. In this model, women are portrayed as temptresses to be kept on a short leash or else they will inevitably draw unsuspecting men into illicit relationships, or they are naïve and need protecting.*

Either way this disciplining/protecting is about controlling the female body. It is not just prejudice; it is legally inscribed in the sharia-based justice system, where policies are geared towards finding evidence for women's immoral behavior and punishing it. Any man working in the military, the security service, or the police has total impunity for rape. Women wearing trousers are punishable by lashes. The 1991 Criminal Law still confuses 'rape' (*ightiSaab*) with adultery (*zina*), by default incriminating victims unless they can prove their lack of consent with four male witnesses. Punishment for *zina* is stoning to death and for extramarital sex is fifty lashes. Police stations are planted in every public and some private hospitals; doctors must report cases of sexual violence before they can treat victims. Police are informed of pregnancies when the husband is absent. Abortion is illegal unless to save the mother's life.

Justice for women in Sudan's revolution?

Ironically, the white *towb* (dress) worn by the Kandaka in the picture above, is a status symbol of respectable professional women in Sudan, by those who uphold and legitimize the Arab-Islamic model for society. It is an index of purity and chastity when out in the public space of men, a metaphorical marriage with the government for working women. It is the dress worn for invisibility, as a morally uncompromising way that women can participate in public life – as stateswomen, civil servants and teachers (Willemse 2001). No one can justifiably sexually harass this kind of woman. But why is *this* the image of a woman symbolizing the

revolution?

As some observers have pointed out, women's activism today not only has a long precedent in Sudan, but that it elides older forms of activism by marginalized women. I share this observation. The focus on Kandakaat obscures inequalities between those who claim to be descendants of those Nubians and the rest of Sudan – the East, the West, and the South, where relations of inequality regarding governance, citizenship, the military, economic integration, education and cultural recognition have led to almost constant regional wars since independence.

Displaced Nuba and sexual and reproductive health

> *What about women, who, due to (pre/post)colonial histories of divide and rule, and unequal centre-periphery socioeconomic relations, have never donned a white towb? Those working in the informal sector, with little or no formal education, living destitute in one of the many displaced communities at the edge of Khartoum? Without denying the sacrifice and suffering of elite women in the protests, displaced women have suffered immeasurably from the Sudanese government's policies – carried out partly through sexual violence, as is well-known for Darfur, but also notably in the Nuba Mountains.*

This extends beyond the grossest violations to all the sexual and reproductive health troubles that the female body can suffer in displacement – the increased likelihood of prostitution and transactional sex; those working in the market selling-tea or brewing alcohol are at greater risk of SGBV due to their purported immoral profession, sitting out in market spaces reserved for men. Such precarity lends itself to poor mental health, despair, unwanted pregnancies, dangerous abortions and STD/HIV infections.

Nuba people are not the same as Nubians; they originate from the Nuba Mountains, an elevated rocky region surrounded by farm lands in southern Sudan. While today they unite under the label Nuba, they are made up of roughly fifty ethnic groups and languages, identify as Black and African, and practice Islam, Christianity and shamanism. Forced Islamisation and Arabisation have resulted both in widespread integration into and resistance to the way of life of the elites of the Nile Valley (Rottenburg, Ille, and Lamoureaux forthcoming). Since the 1980s (with a hiatus), a war has been going on in the Nuba Mountains between the government and the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, now (SPLA-North) – forcing over a million Nuba people from the Mountains into refugee camps and cities across East Africa, Europe, the US and Australia.

Missing from images of the revolution (with some exception) are the Nuba women with whom I carried out my doctoral research. I asked my research assistant, a Nuba woman living in a resettled migrant community at the outskirts of Khartoum, if the local outspoken and activist Christian women in the community were participating in this revolution. She replied: "Some women support it, but most of them are saying, let Arabs protest among themselves because they don't want Black people, and sometimes they kill us when we want to shout." She was referring to the danger of being visible, Black, Nuba and in her case Christian.

> *Public visibility is a luxury that few women can afford, unless they can purchase treatment, discretion and care by avoiding public services.*

From this perspective this is not *their* revolution, but an Arab-Muslim one, although their grievances are against the same oppressor.

Claiming moral worth through justice or justification?

The woman above also wears a white robe, here, indexing the 'mothers' of the Episcopal Church of Sudan. I took this picture in 2012 in Dar-es-salaam, a neighbourhood of now resettled Nuba and Darfuris in Khartoum's western periphery, when the war in the Nuba Mountains resumed. My research centered on Christian Nuba Moro women's activism in this context. I found that reading, writing and speaking in prayer or sermons enabled women to participate in an ethnonational movement, built on the problematic of a moral breakdown due to fragmented families, the loss of community, the destructive life in the city – in the "wilderness" and "among the Arabs".

Two forms of opposition to Arab-Islamic domination emerged. One line of reasoning oriented towards modernity, recognition and claiming rights; the other focused on recovering so-called lost values among Moro Nuba themselves. The former discourse applied to masculine domains of speaking, ethnic nationalism, engagements with NGOs and activism that could take place in public at the interface with Arabs and other ethnic groups. The latter discourse was feminine, nostalgic, and looked to the purity of the past, and the female body for the recovery of the community.

In this latter discourse, women, as the embodiment of the community, bore the brunt of the moral crisis and the tools to remedy it could be found in Christian values: love, learning, forgiveness, charity and compassion, as the path to a modern moral community. Church women encouraged others to make amends with abusive, alcoholic and unemployed husbands, give their money to them, prepare their meals, clean their homes, raise educated children, and steer away from the dangers of life among Arabs – not to mingle with Arabs in the market, to marry among Nuba Christians, and keep the community pure by exercising bodily self-control. Many debates addressed the moral breakdown through its core concerns of the sexual and reproductive body: blood, breastfeeding, STD/HIV transmission, hygiene and cleanliness, circumcision, barrenness and fertility,

adultery, polygamy, virginity and prostitution.

> *Differently from the Kandaka protesting in the revolution, these women did not single out distinct bodily injustices in a mode of moral individualism. Rather, their concern was that through individual acts of self-control, community morality could also be restored. It wasn't about individual rights but about self-transformation.*

Asserting worth was about justifying it in a context of impossibility. I drew on a model of justification from the pragmatic sociology of critique (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006) to argue that women appeal to a hierarchy of shared values, through which they could claim virtue in spite of the bodily injustices they may have experienced. A mother might justify transactional sex with the need to pay her children's school fees; a woman in a polygamous marriage might restore her worth through church activism; or an abortion is justified since the father was a Muslim.

Such justifications are about restoring feelings of bodily integrity, rather than legal reparations. This undoubtedly requires a definition of justice unlike that of 'restorative justice' through truth commissions – one that accounts for worthiness. In a situation of prolonged displacement, and precarity, justification, or even justice, is claimed through redeeming practices of establishing worth.

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Featured image (cropped) by Lana H. Haroun

Double disappearance after Oman’s Dhufar war

Alice Wilson
July, 2019

The Omani government has silenced requests to reveal the location of the graves of executed insurgents from the Dhufar war 1965-1975. Thwarted claims-making under authoritarianism leads to these insurgents' double disappearance: they have disappeared physically and from public discourse. Nevertheless, they have not disappeared from popular memory.

In April 2016, Omani writer, film critic and human rights activist Abdullah Habib wrote a post on Facebook that would lead to the Omani government arresting and imprisoning him. Habib suggested that forty years after Oman's government had defeated the Marxist insurgency in the southern Dhufar region, it was time for the government to reveal the location of graves of executed revolutionaries.

Habib's arrest shows how sensitive the Dhufar war remains in Oman. The 1965-1975 conflict saw Oman's army and allies wage a counter-insurgency campaign against Dhufar's liberation movement. The Front began in 1965 as an opposition movement contesting Britain's protégé, Sultan Said bin Taimur. From 1968, adopting the name the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf, the insurgent leadership adopted a Marxist agenda. Fearing the spread of Communism, the Sultanate and its British, Iranian and Jordanian allies intensified the counter-insurgency and formally defeated the Front in 1975.

The Sultanate has long emphasised a narrative of how Sultan Qaboos bin Said has brought national progress to Oman. At the same time the government has imposed silence about insurgents' experiences during the war. Forty years after the Front's defeat, the Sultanate still enforces this silence, as is clear from the detainment of Abdullah Habib following his post about Front victims of government violence. Yet Habib's words also suggest that when an authoritarian state punishes public claims-making about the fate of disappeared former opponents, people find other ways of maintaining memories and narratives about the disappeared.

> *A state can orchestrate a double disappearance – disappearance of bodies and disappearance from public narratives – but disappearance from memory remains elusive.*

Some states have become infamous for their responsibility in disappearing citizens, and face well-publicised claims from the relatives of the disappeared. Activists seek to know the location of the missing, what happened to them, and, in some cases, they demand compensation. The possibilities for claims-making, and its potential success, vary within different political environments. A liberal democracy may offer freedom of expression to advance claims, but may not necessarily guarantee that the state will respond. France's government took 61 years to acknowledge its responsibility for the death of French communist Maurice Audin during Algeria's war for independence. Authoritarian governments

may not preclude claims-making: the protests of Argentine mothers demanding to know what happened to their offspring who disappeared during the "dirty war" of the military government 1976-1983 began in 1977 during the dictatorship.

Nevertheless, claims-making on behalf of the disappeared is not always possible. In Oman, Sultan Qaboos has ruled as an absolute monarch since 1970. The Sultan is the ultimate source of lines of patronage which distribute resources to Omanis. Thus, on the one hand, the state encourages Omanis to make claims on it for resources and favours. For instance, opportunities for claims-making have included the Sultan's royal tours of the territory to meet citizens and hear their claims directly. Reflecting the practice of making claims on the Sultan, Oman's Arab Spring protestors pledged loyalty to the Sultan and sought his intervention to resolve perceived economic and political issues.

On the other hand, the Omani state penalises unacceptable forms of claims-making which contradict the state-endorsed narratives of Oman's history and national identity. Accordingly, making claims in response to the government's violence during the Dhufar war is out of bounds in public discussion in Oman. Although there are monuments to the pro-government troops who died fighting to defend the Sultan's rule during the Dhufar war, and although Omanis can watch films which celebrate those soldiers' stories, in Oman there are no equivalent public forms of acknowledgement of the experiences of the defeated revolutionaries.

The detainment of those who foreground unacceptable demands, as Habib did, is one of a range of techniques through which Oman's government silences unwanted claims-making. No Omanis are allowed freedom of association to form political parties, and so potential opposition figures cannot set up a political association to stage oppositional claims formally. In Dhufar's early post-war period the Omani government offered material incentives to ex-revolutionaries and family members in order to attract their support. Many Dhufaris believe that, over the post-war decades, some ex-revolutionaries have continued to receive material handouts which have helped to ensure their ongoing co-optation. Whilst

these techniques marginalise unwanted claims, ironically the arrest of dissidents can make claims-making more visible. Habib's arrest, detention and subsequent release may have brought only greater national and international attention to his claims.

Habib's demands to know the location of the graves of the disappeared show that, despite decades of official silence, memories of the defeated revolutionaries including those who disappeared survive. Daily life and practices help fortify these memories. When Habib called for the graves' location to be disclosed, he noted the rights of mothers to visit the graves of their sons at Eid. Although authoritarianism thwarts unwanted claims-making in public, everyday family life and the memories it supports mean that double disappearance in physical and discursive spheres falls short of complete disappearance.

Featured image: Hans Birger Nilsen (flickr, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Accountability in statelessness

Judith Beyer
July, 2019

In this post, I outline first findings from my ongoing research project on "Accountability in statelessness." The project is based on observations from ethnographic fieldwork among expert activists whose work focuses on holding nation states accountable to provide an end to statelessness. I also work with textual data obtained from my work as a country-of-origin expert in asylum cases in the UK, in which individuals are expected to give accounts of themselves in order to prove that they are stateless. Finally, I explore accountability as an

anthropological concept in its broadest sense, as well as in the more specific sense of “perpetrator accountability,” taking the case of Southeast Asian Muslim Rohingya as a prime example. In this post, I will show some few ways in which I see accountability being interlinked with statelessness.

Holding the state accountable. The role of expert activists

In my ongoing research project I focus on “expert activists,” as I call them, who have made the nation state their opponent. Their protest ground is located in the centers of power rather than on “the streets”. Their strategies are varied and encompass the organization of conferences and meetings, the public launching of reports in direct vicinity to or within state, EU- or UN- facilities, but also strategic litigation, art projects and the developing of tools for teaching about statelessness. They yield the law, litigation, policy documents, and the writing of reports as their tools of resistance. Any state that has not ratified the two UN conventions on statelessness (from 1954 and 1961), any state that does not adhere to the two legal texts’ proclamations; any state that has no specific statelessness determination procedures in place; or any state that threatens to or has already denaturalized any of its citizens, might become the target of expert activists fighting statelessness. Depending on the organizational set-up, their set tasks and goals might be small, while others are encompassing and some appear utopian. In the words of one representative of a small NGO from Southern Europe that concentrates mainly on strategic litigation: “we first wanted to go against Greece, but we did not have the capacities, so we only went against Albania.” A focus on this kind of experts will provide a new angle within the emerging anthropology of activism.

Among expert activists, statelessness is characterized as an anomaly, something that is not supposed to occur in a world of nation states. And indeed, the UN Refugee Agency wants statelessness to end by 2024. With the launch of their 10-

year campaign entitled *iBelong* in 2014, they engaged a wide network of organizations, experts and activists in their endeavor to fight statelessness and guarantee every individual the right to a nationality. Most expert activists with whom I am currently working concentrate on raising awareness for the need to amend national legislation and put their efforts into helping individuals obtain citizenship or at least secure an official status as being recognized as a stateless person who can claim rights of her own and is worthy of protection. However, it is mostly within nation states that people become de facto stateless first.

> *Making people stateless, including one's own citizens, is often an intended side-effect of national engineering, of resizing populations, redrawing borders and trying to keep an upper hand on the question of the ethno-religious majority-minority ratio.*

Thus, the reasons why the numbers of stateless people have not decreased in the last decade since the UN has launched its campaign are not only to be sought in the beginnings of new wars (particularly Syria) or mass expulsions as in the case of the Rohingya in Myanmar, but in the very set-up of the nation state itself that will keep on othering unwanted Others in order to reassure itself of its very principles. This paradox makes an anthropological investigation of statelessness particularly interesting as it complicates previous understandings of the relation between state and citizenship. This has been noted in academic work on statelessness (Bloom 2017, Cole 2000), but is rarely heard among expert activists who need to sideline the structural set-up of the nation state they are operating in, in order to be able to operate at all.

Having to give an account of oneself. Proving

statelessness in asylum claims

Statelessness can be technically differentiated into *de jure* and *de facto* statelessness; while this difference clearly matters, it is not easy to demarcate both. The problem with *de facto* statelessness lies in the fact that it circumscribes the lived experiences of an individual independently of their actual legal status, and has to cover a lot of quite different phenomena. The problem with *de jure* statelessness, which is defined in the 1954 Convention as "a person not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law" (Art 1,1), lies with the burden that is put on individuals to account for their status as "stateless" in a court. By having to give accounts of who they "really" are, and being challenged on them every step of the way, individuals who claim to be stateless are in effect being personally made responsible for their own fate: The burden of proof is on them (and their lawyers).

So, while expert activists demand accountability from nation states for their treatment of stateless people, states demand accountability from stateless people. This happens as soon as persons claiming statelessness and seeking asylum come into contact with a nation state, personified by an immigration agent at the border.

> *Those "first contact encounters" not only reveal how accounts are being co-produced in interaction but also how "culture as fact" is created to be added as "evidence" to the evolving asylum case.*

Over the course of an approximately two-hour interview, decision-makers and claimants will become members of an interaction, albeit unequal ones with contradictory goals, one more personal, one more institutional, and each trying to impose a definition of the situation that the other cannot refute. Two things happen in this process: first, they co-create documents (even if antagonistically) that give accounts of their interaction as well as of their positionalities. These documents will later be used in court, thus extending their face-to-face interaction into the future and enlarging the participating audience. Thus, not only is the

case of the claimant argued, but the validity of the state's account of itself is substantiated as well.

According to ethnomethodology, giving accounts "depends on the mastery of ethno-methods" (Giddens 1979: 57; 83; Garfinkel 1967). Even as the actors do not know each other personally, there is still common-sense knowledge and implicit understandings at work in those "first contact encounters", as I call them. The two interlocutors – the immigration agent and the asylum seeker – engage in a to-and-fro during the interview: One is trying to continuously update their accounts based on what the other person has said or what they imagine the person needs to hear, and the other much more freely switches topics in their efforts to fulfil the parameters of their inquiry. What is unclear, however, is whether actors also work towards establishing a "meaningful social outcome" as is usually assumed in ethnomethodology, since their interests are diametrically opposed: one wanting to stay, the other one having to exercise "the sovereign right to exclude" (Anderson et al. 2011: 549), even when wanting to "help" migrants (what Verkaaik 2010 has called the "cachet dilemma"). Such "document acts" (Smith 2014) keep the shared fantasy of "the state" alive that lies at the core of both modes of reasoning: On the one hand, "the politics of conditional hospitality" (Khosravi 2010) that is exercised by the "host" at the border needs to be understood as an incremental part of nation-building: reconfirming the state's territory, its populace and its power by "welcoming the other to appropriate for oneself a place and then speak the language of hospitality" (Derrida 1999, 15-16; cited after Khosravi 2011: 126). On the other hand, the stateless asylum seeker has learned that in order to be able to enjoy any rights at all, they will need to become a citizen or an officially recognized stateless person (see also Andersson 2014, 222f.). However, there is no right to citizenship, and thus states can neither be held accountable for failing to "naturalize" those who seek asylum nor are they held accountable for making people stateless themselves.

Perpetrator accountability vs. making the making of statelessness count

Accountability is an essential element in calls for justice: it is what is demanded from war criminals, for example. The UN High Commissioner stated the following after the International Court of Justice (ICC) had released the verdict against Ratko Mladic in Yugoslavia on November 22, 2017: "Today's verdict is a warning to the perpetrators of such crimes that they will not escape justice, no matter how powerful they may be nor how long it may take. They will be held accountable". But while war criminals may be held accountable for genocide, they are not explicitly accused of having caused statelessness, even if that is the outcome of their actions. Consider the case of the Rohingya, where statelessness has and continues to impact on the lives of millions. By now, it has been internationally acknowledged that the most recent expulsion of over one million ethnic Rohingya from Myanmar to Bangladesh since 2012 constitutes genocide, and the demand has been made that the atrocities committed by the armed forces should be brought before the ICC. Several times, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya were uprooted from their homes and forced to relocate between the two countries. Neither Myanmar nor Bangladesh have ratified the two UN conventions on statelessness (while having ratified the Genocide Convention already in the 1950s), even as they have been engaged with the issue of how to deal with the Rohingya since the 1970s. Through rejection of the specific legal framework available, they have evaded accountability while giving very specific and partly incommensurable accounts for their actions. Demanding an end to the Rohingya's current statelessness, while certainly sensible and noble, at the same time misses how the two nation states have operated and how their modes of reasoning continue to build on the British colonial set-up that brought the two nations into being in the first place.

Here's a provocative thought: would it not help stateless people like the Rohingya a lot more if public debates would not only center on the question whether perpetrators had committed an act of genocide or "merely" a crime against

humanity, resulting in a call for justice for those who have been killed; but if one could hold people specifically accountable for making hundreds of thousands stateless in the course of these events?

> *Statelessness should be understood as an often intended rather than a mere side-effect of other "clearance" operations. The results are not only long-term for those who have to live through times of extreme violence and forced migration, but they impact on future generations as increasingly children are being born into statelessness.*

It is important to emphasize that this is not about comparison, or about grading such horrifying offenses. But what if causing statelessness was a prosecutable offence, or at least what if it was publicly acknowledged that statelessness is the result of policies and actions, rather than a natural and unfortunate occurrence? Maybe then, the burden of accountability would no longer be with the stateless but with those who have made them so.

** I thank Luigi Achilli for comments and suggestions.

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Paradoxes of child statelessness in Sabah

Catherine Allerton
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Since 2012, I have been researching and writing about the difficult situation faced by the children of Filipino and Indonesian refugees and migrants living in the East Malaysian state of Sabah. Most of these children have been born in Sabah and yet are treated in the state as ‘foreigners’ who belong elsewhere. They are denied access to state education and healthcare, and spend much of their lives in squatter settlements or rudimentary housing attached to timber yards, chicken farms, quarries and other workplaces, out of sight of most Malaysian citizens.

For UNICEF, UNHCR and other organisations interested in these children, the most difficult (and most significant) aspect of their situation is that they are at risk of statelessness. Certainly, this was also a key motivation for my own ethnographic fieldwork, in Sabah’s capital city of Kota Kinabalu, from 2012-13. I wanted to see the difference that being stateless made to children’s everyday

lives and experiences, to research their perspectives on (non)citizenship and (excluded) belonging, and to contribute new empirical data and theoretical insights to understandings of statelessness.

> *And yet, both on the ground in Sabah, and at my desk as I write up my material, I have found that child statelessness is a deeply paradoxical issue to explore.*

From the perspective of the history of anthropology, contemporary experiences of statelessness as exclusion might appear confusing. After all, much of early political anthropology was devoted to showing how thoroughly unproblematic statelessness was. In *African Political Systems*, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard argued that 'societies without a state' were organised along the lines of kinship. Who needs citizenship when you are a member of a lineage, and when that membership neatly divides up your socio-spatial world? The idea that statelessness is a form of marginalization is paradoxical when viewed from this disciplinary history.

Contemporary statelessness researchers are more likely to be inspired by Hannah Arendt's work, particularly her famous argument that the stateless lacked even the 'right to have rights' (Arendt 1968: 296). A key aspect of statelessness is that it exposes the paradox of how rights and freedoms do not, in practice, attach to individuals as general human subjects but, rather, as specific citizens. Similarly, the child rights enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) – to protection and participation, to education, health and respect – also turn out to be dependent on being recognised as a legitimate child-citizen. In 2002, despite being a signatory to the CRC, the Malaysian government reformed its Education Act, preventing the enrolment of 'non-citizen' children in its schools. Several young people I met in Sabah recalled for me the moment in 2002 when they were summoned to the headteacher of the Malaysian school they attended, and told they were no longer allowed to attend. Denying child rights to resident non-citizens is just one of the ways in which Malaysian nationalism designates its 'others', and reveals the practical emptiness of the notion of universal (non-state-

dependent) child rights.

> *However, though the stories of educational exclusion that I heard in Sabah were painful for many who told them, a further paradox of child statelessness is that it is not best represented as a state of pure 'abjection'.*

The anthropology of children, and childhood studies more generally, has long explored the paradox between how children are represented – whether by their parents or other adults, whether in stories or for humanitarian campaigns – and the reality of their lives. In 1978, Myra Bluebond-Langner's ground-breaking, child-focused ethnographic work showed how leukemic children on a US hospital ward were aware *both* of the reality of their own terminal illness, *and* of the necessity of not allowing their parents to know that they knew they were dying. That is, despite the reality of their knowledge, children felt compelled to maintain a pretence of ignorance in order to preserve a particular image of 'innocent childhood'.

In my own work, I explore the paradoxical disconnect between dominant, problematic representations of stateless children in Sabah – as homeless and living on the streets, as criminally-minded, as culturally-uninterested in education – and the realities of children's complex forms of belonging (see Allerton 2017). Most stateless children in Kota Kinabalu are not children forced to live on the streets after the deportation of their parents. In fact, children have wide networks of extended and adoptive family members, and in the cases where parents had been detained or arrested, there were always other adults ready to step in and care for children. Despite Sabah's media representations, most stateless children live out-of-the-way with their families, trying to find whatever education they can in informal learning centres. Their situation is one of both vulnerability and resilience. In and around the city, I met numerous, multi-generational, undocumented families who, unrecognised by the Malaysian state, nevertheless contributed to the smooth running of the city. Stateless mothers washed dishes in the kitchens of schools from which their own children were excluded; Indonesian-

origin teenagers with no formal schooling worked in timber yards; women facing eviction from squatter settlements cleaned local houses with, as one described it to me, ‘more toilets than people.’

This brings me to the final paradox of researching child statelessness in Sabah. Although international campaigns – such as UNHCR’s #IBelong campaign, launched in 2014 – approach statelessness as *the* primary issue that the stateless face, this is not necessarily the case. Children, in particular, may be unclear about the precise specificities of their documentation; what they care about is being documented, spoken of locally as ‘having a pass’. Children and grandchildren of Filipino refugees, who carry ‘IMM13’ identity cards, may be effectively stateless, but they ‘have a pass’ and are safe from being picked up in regular ‘checking’ operations. By contrast, a child with an Indonesian passport but no valid visa may not be stateless, but ‘does not have a pass’, and is therefore likely to be relatively immobile, scared of ‘checking’ by immigration officials.

> *The desire to ‘have a pass’ leads, in Sabah, to documentary pragmatism, a flexible attitude to the tactical acquisition or borrowing of identity documents.*

However, such pragmatism may have unintended or potentially problematic future consequences for children. One boy, the son of a Catholic migrant from eastern Indonesia, had been left in a strange kind of legal orphanhood after his father took a new, Muslim name as part of his strategy to acquire Malaysian citizenship. This boy’s own birth certificate, stamped with ‘non-citizen’, continues to show his father’s old, Christian name, and makes it more difficult for the father’s citizenship to make a difference to the boy’s circumstances.

Anti-statelessness campaigns tend to see the acquisition of documents as the way to ‘solve’ statelessness. And yet, if we recognise that statelessness is not always *the* most pressing issue for poor families in some migrant contexts, we can better understand the decisions of some migrant families of Filipino origin who I encountered. These families are often holders of IMM13 cards, cards that were originally given to refugees and that entitle them to work, but not to access any

state services. Nevertheless, such families may prefer to endure a limbo of ongoing noncitizenship and potential statelessness, renewing their IMM13 cards annually, rather than making any claims for Filipino citizenship. When a mobile unit of the Philippines National Statistics Office visited Kota Kinabalu, one girl, the granddaughter of Filipino refugees, told me that her family would most certainly not be applying for Philippines citizenship. For this girl and her family, what matters is not 'solving' their potential statelessness through acquiring any citizenship, but holding out for the specific recognition (as Malaysian residents or citizens) that they feel they deserve. Such stateless children have a clear idea of where they feel they belong. As one young boy said to me, quite fiercely, after I had clumsily asked him where he was from: 'I am a person from here!'

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Introduction to stateless/displaced/disappeared

Judith Beyer
July, 2019

This thematic thread evolved out of a workshop on *Claiming justice after conflict. The stateless, the displaced and the disappeared at the margins of the state*, co-organized by Yazid Ben-Hounet (Paris) and Judith Beyer (Konstanz). The presenters consisted of anthropologists and sociologists and convened for a full day on March 15, 2019, at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris. Shalini Randeria (Vienna) and Bertram Turner (Halle) provided thoughtful and constructive comments. The workshop was funded by a grant from the Collège d'Études Mondiales of the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH) and constituted the first of several building blocks towards an interdisciplinary project devoted to a comparative, empirical study of statelessness, displacement and disappearance.

Comparing categories

What do statelessness, displacement and disappearance have in common? All three have become familiar and inescapable features of contemporary politics worldwide. While the UNHCR plans to "end statelessness by 2024", there is no end to the production of stateless people in sight. Wars and other conflicts lead to internal and external displacement of refugees, sometimes without a chance to return, to migration more generally and also to individuals disappearing altogether. But statelessness might also be born out of state collapse; it can result from the active deprivation of citizenship; it can be a political tool governments wield to exclude "terrorists", for example. But in contrast to displacement and disappearance, statelessness has at least the potential to acquire a positive connotation when it becomes juridically recognized by international and national law as a specific policy-relevant status. In such discourses, statelessness becomes endowed with rights, and recognized statelessness can offer safety by giving individuals who have been "stuck" or in "limbo", as it is often called, a legal status in the society they are residing in. In a time when the promise of nation states seems unfulfilled, it can even be pursued as an appropriate political condition.

Currently, 70.8 million people have been forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. UNHCR has

calculated, that in 2018 the number of new displacements was equivalent to an average of 37,000 people being forced to flee their homes every day. Compared to statelessness, the category of "the displaced" seems more contingent and less normatively ambivalent: It greatly depends on an individual case how the life of a displaced person plays out: While some internally displaced people (IDP) have come to terms with a new way of life, especially if their home has been destroyed due to *force majeure* like environmental catastrophes, others have been waiting to "go home" for decades after a war or conflict, and live every day with a strong sense of estrangement and injustice.

Finally, "the disappeared" is a fundamentally negative category, affecting relatives who remain behind, activists and concerned institutions (as well as the researchers interested in investigating the phenomenon), and of course the disappeared themselves. To engage with the problem of "the disappeared" constitutes a struggle with the very category by trying to make the invisible visible. More than moving people "out of limbo" or back "in place", as in the case of the stateless or the displaced, and rather than legally enshrining or accommodating a status, disappearance as a phenomenon is irreversible, even if there are globally increasing efforts, decades after, to retrieve and identify mortal remains, for example, or to commemorate those who have gone missing.

In order to draw out differences and similarities between the three categories statelessness, displacement and disappearance, the posts of this week will focus on the two cross-cutting themes of who can claim justice on whose behalf and the various ways in which uncertainty is being processed.

Making claims, processing uncertainty

The question of who can claim justice on whose behalf is first of all a question of representation, but also touches on scale, resources and access. In our case studies, we noticed that rather than focusing on individual actors, we all engaged with groups, with women, with youth or with the families of those left behind: While their numbers are often among the first that get counted, their stories are

more difficult to gather. We consider such a decentering of a generic (and often male) individual a fruitful avenue into our future comparative research endeavors.

In the first post, **Catherine Allerton** engages with statelessness and the problem of the invisibility of migrant children and their families in Sabah, Malaysia. Their stories are about vulnerability as much as they are about resilience. Employing the concept of "documentary pragmatism," Allerton explains that for her interlocutors, the goal is "being safe" rather than being documented.

In her post on Wednesday, **Judith Beyer** explores the relation between accountability and statelessness. First, by investigating the case of expert activists in Europe who have declared a fight against statelessness by trying to hold nation states accountable. Second, she looks at asylum cases in the UK where stateless individuals have to give accounts of themselves. She argues that while expert activists demand accountability from nation states, it is nation states who demand accountability from stateless people.

If people cannot make claims vis-à-vis the state at all, we pondered the question of what they might be doing instead. One option that **Alice Wilson** explores in her post on Thursday is a shift in the very discussions people are having about disappearance: in her case in the context of Oman's southern Dhufar region. She argues that the possibilities for claims-making, and its potential success, vary within different political environments. A liberal democracy may offer freedom of expression to advance claims, but may not necessarily guarantee that the state will respond. Making claims in response to the government's violence during the Dhufar war is out of bounds in public discussion in Oman, Wilson argues.

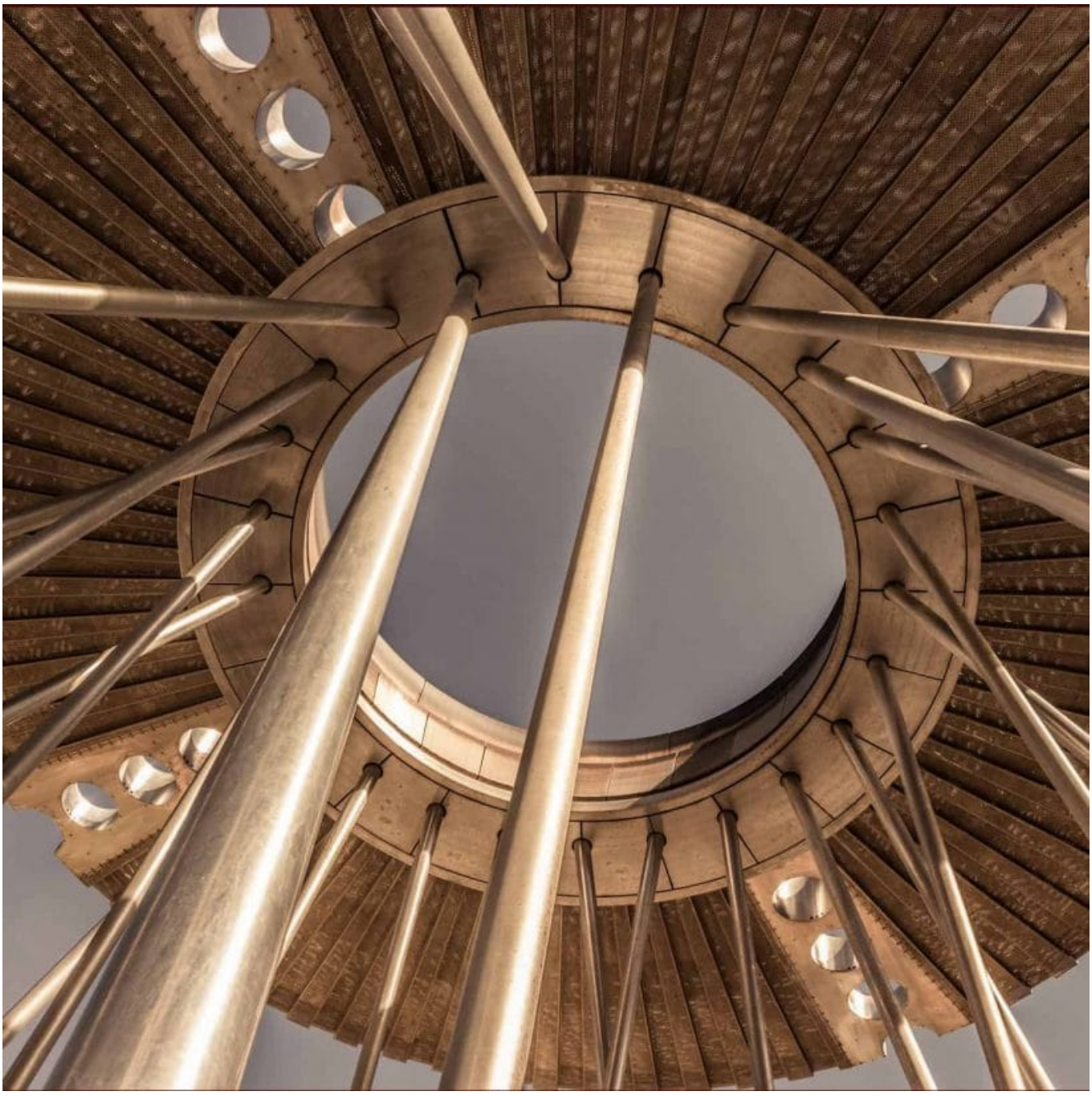
We also asked what would be a minimal requirement for a case of justice to be made. If not through the justice system which is structurally disposed against the disappeared, what are other pragmatic ways in which constrained and oppressed actors manage to establish justice by, for example, at least retaining a sense of moral worth? Turning to divinity and religious belief is one of the possibilities which **Siri Lamoureaux** explores in her Friday post on displaced Nuba women in

Sudan. Other options are the public shaming and accusing of perpetrators by the so-called “Nubian Queens.” In light of the recent events her post bears particular urgency.

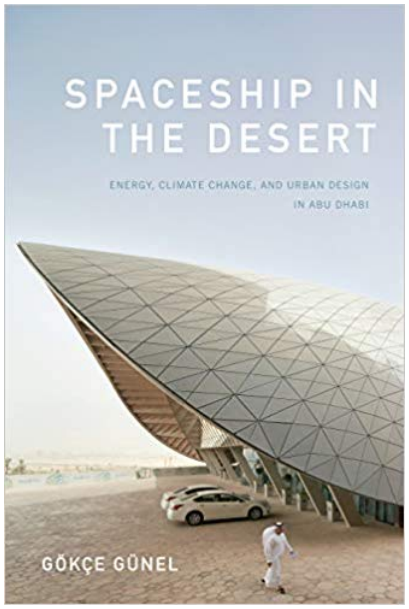
How the three categories of statelessness, displacement and disappearance relate to one another and how and into what ways they evolve and transform will be the subject of our future research. That they are connected and can blend into each other will be shown in this thematic thread.

Podcast Round up: Best of May

Ian M. Cook
July, 2019



Did you hear the one about the sperm and the consultant? No? How about ‘why did the UFO cross the road’? (Was it too meet a spaceship? Because she was hungry?) Well, (bad) jokes aside, you can hear about all of these in our latest round up of podcasts courtesy, as always, of our dear friends at New Books in Anthropology.



Spaceship in the Desert. Energy, Climate Change, and Urban Design in Abu Dhabi
by Gökçe Günel
(Duke University Press, 2019)

Whether in space colonies or through geo-engineering, the looming disaster of climate change inspires no shortage of techno-utopian visions of human survival. Most of such hypotheses remain science fiction, but in *Spaceship in the Desert: Energy, Climate Change, and Urban Design in Abu Dhabi* (Duke University Press, 2019), Gökçe Günel explores the United Arab Emirates's planned Masdar City, an experimental attempt at designing an emissions-free society. The first parts of Masdar City opened beside the Abu Dhabi airport in 2010 as an oil-wealth funded initiative to establish the UAE as a leader in the renewable energy sector and to begin to prepare the emirates for a low or post-oil economy. Masdar attracted students and researchers from around the world to test, and be test subjects, for innovations including personal rapid transit, energy currencies, carbon capture and storage, and closed-loop resource circuits. Quickly, however, the master plan was abandoned as unworkable; but Masdar City has also not been a failure. Rather, Günel explores the interconnected social, technical, and political ramifications and adaptations involved in this attempt to design a potential fossil fuel-free future. She shrewdly criticizes the limitations of climate change strategies intended to protect the political economic status quo. Yet also, through deep ethnographic fieldwork with participants, Günel demonstrates the valuable role of anthropological insight in social and technological adaptations to a changing climate.

Interview by Lance C. Thurner
Listen **here**!

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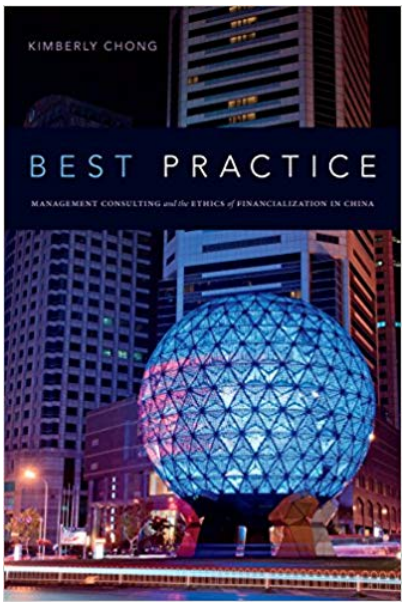

Best Practice: Management Consulting and the Ethics of Financialization in China
by Kimberly Chong
(Duke University Press 2018)

What do management consultants do, and how do they do it? These two deceptively simple questions are at the centre of *Best Practice: Management Consulting and the Ethics of Financialization in China* (Duke University Press, 2018), the new book by Kimberly Chong, a lecturer in anthropology at University College London. The book uses an in depth and immersive ethnography of a global management consulting firm to explore the rise of management consultancy in China, engaging with key issues- financialization and commensuration- that are at the heart of understanding contemporary global capitalism. The book is rich with fascinating, and at times hilarious, examples of the contradictions and ambivalences, along with successes, of management consulting systems adapted to and applied in China. It will be essential reading across the social sciences and area studies, as well as for anyone interested in our

globalised economy.

Interview by Dave O'Brien
Listen **here**!

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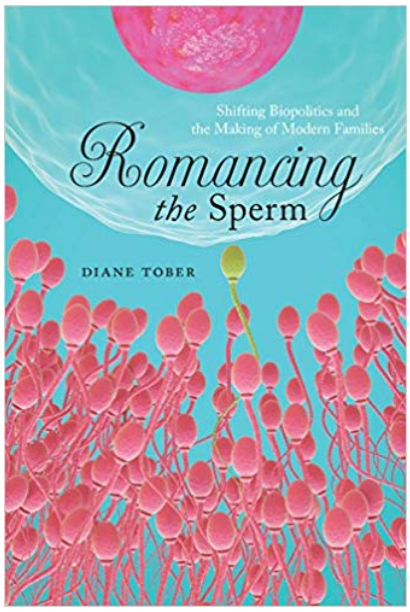

Romancing the Sperm: Shifting Biopolitics and the Making of Modern Families
by Diane Tober
(Rutgers University Press 2018)

The development of a whole suite of new reproductive technologies in recent decades has contributed to broad cultural conversations and controversies over the meaning of family in the United States. In *Romancing the Sperm: Shifting Biopolitics and the Making of Modern Families* (Rutgers University Press, 2018), Diane Tober analyzes how sperm donation fits into this larger landscape of reproductive choices, politics, and policies. Drawing on a rich body of interviews conducted in the 1990's with people who worked at sperm banks, people who donated sperm, and people who sought to become pregnant by using donated sperm, she illuminates the many motivations that lead people to become involved

in alternative processes of family formation. She also demonstrates that a certain kind of "romance" – that is, the imaginative creation of a romantic ideal – can still permeate people's ideas and experiences of creating children with donor sperm, despite the medicalization of the process. This book will be useful not only for those who are interested in medical anthropology and the anthropology of reproduction, but also anyone who wants to rethink traditional notions of family formation.

Interview by Dannah Dennis
Listen **here**!

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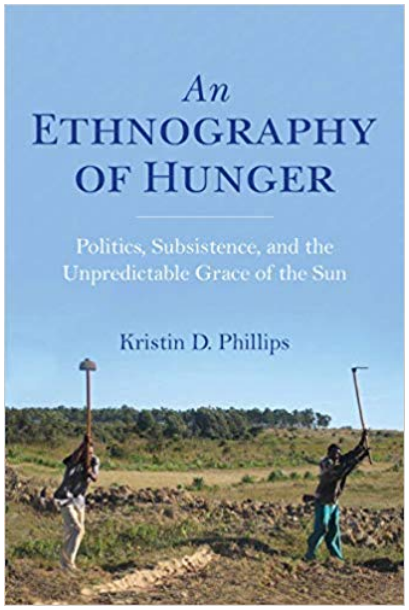

An Ethnography of Hunger: Politics, Subsistence, and the Unpredictable Grace of the Sun
by Kristin D. Phillips
(Indiana University Press 2018)

Families in parts of rural Tanzania regularly face periods when they cut back on their meals because their own food stocks are running short and they cannot afford to buy food. Kristin D. Phillips' new book *An Ethnography of Hunger: Politics, Subsistence, and the Unpredictable Grace of the Sun* (Indiana University

Press, 2018) provides a deeply empathetic portrait of rural life in Singida, in central Tanzania. Her study is both a memoir of rural life during a food shortage and a deeply insightful analysis of how subsistence farming and the ongoing threat of hunger structures relationships and politics. Phillips engages the work of prominent analysts of hunger and politics like James Scott, Amartya Sen, and James Ferguson, engaging their insights but also expanding upon them with her recognition of how people build and maintain relationships that protect them as they live in constant vulnerability or precarity. Her study illustrates how this precarity influences people's participation in Tanzania's society by making claims on somewhat impersonal rights as citizens, as opposed to more intimate relations of patronage.

Interview by Paul Bjerk
Listen **here**!

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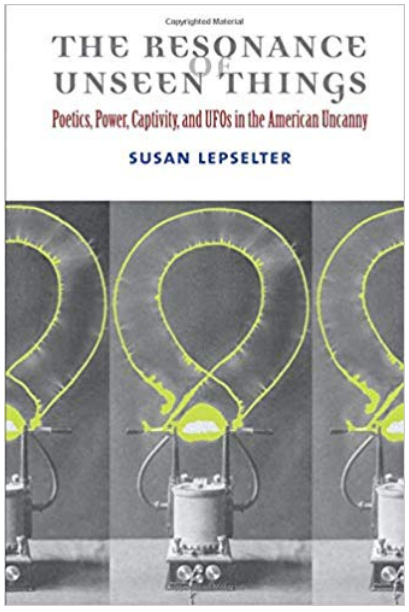

The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny
by Susan Lepselter
(University of Michigan Press 2016)

When we talk about stories of alien abduction in the United States, we often do so through a framework of belief vs. disbelief. Do I think this story is true, or do I think it's false? Anthropologist Susan Lepselter asks what happens when we instead listen to "UFO talk" ethnographically, understanding it as a form of vernacular American poetics that must be made sense of within specific cultural and political contexts. In *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny* (University of Michigan Press, 2016), Lepselter draws on years of interviews with "experiencers," those who tell of being abducted by aliens, and participant-observation at an experiencers support group in a southern US city. Her wide-ranging book considers abduction stories in relation to other narrative forms—captivity narratives, conspiracy theories, frontier tales—offering new and shifting frameworks for making sense of the weird, uncanny, random, and real.

Interview by Carrie Lane
Listen **here**!

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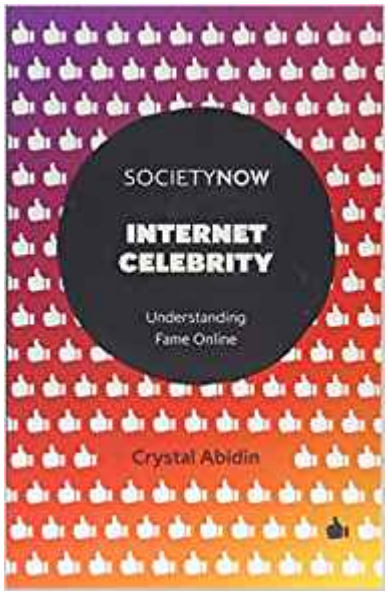
Podcast Round Up: Best of March & April

Ian M. Cook
July, 2019

Sore eyes? Glasses need cleaning and you've misplaced your cleaning cloth? Need something to do whilst desperately hoping your baby will fall asleep on you and then being too scared to move once they've passed out and you've drank too much coffee to pass out as well? Well, we're here to help with our latest round up of podcasts from New Books in Anthropology.



Internet Celebrity. Understanding Fame Online
by Dr. Crystal Abidin
(Emerald Publishing 2018)

What does it mean to be famous on the Internet? How do people become Internet celebrities, and what can that celebrity be used to do? Dr. Crystal Abidin offers anthropological insight into these questions in her book *Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online* (Emerald Publishing, 2018). Drawing on case studies from around the world, Dr. Abidin identifies the qualities that contribute to the making of internet celebrity. She explains how some internet celebrities become professional influencers and explores the global implications of the influencer industry. This accessibly written book is aimed at popular audiences and will be indispensable for undergraduate courses about digital culture, for academics who want a clear and cogent introduction to internet celebrity, and for anyone who wants to understand the online worlds in which we increasingly live.

Interview by Danah Dennis
Listen **here**!

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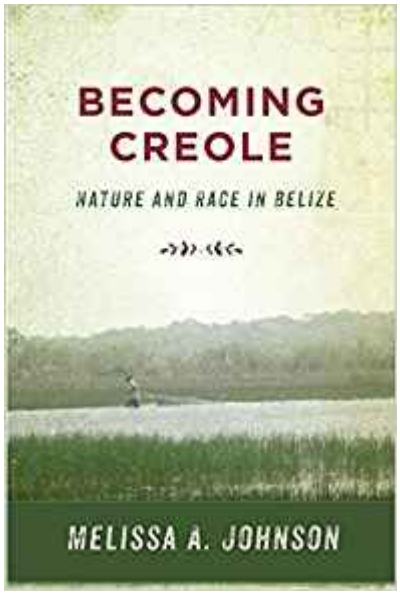

Becoming Creole. Nature and Race in Belize
by Melissa Johnson
(Rutgers University Press 2018)

Drawing from Sylvia Wynter's call for rethinking our category of "human", Melissa Johnson's ethnography *Becoming Creole: Nature and Race in Belize* (Rutgers University Press, 2018) demonstrates how entangled people are with the other-than-human that surrounds them. Mud, water, trees, animals and people form assemblages and shape particular identities. These relationships were also intrinsic to social and political contingencies. Johnson notes the historical legacies of slavery and the search for mahogany in the 19th century and the emergence of ecotourism in the 20th century as part of the process of becoming Creole.

Interview by Alejandra Bronfman
Listen **here**!

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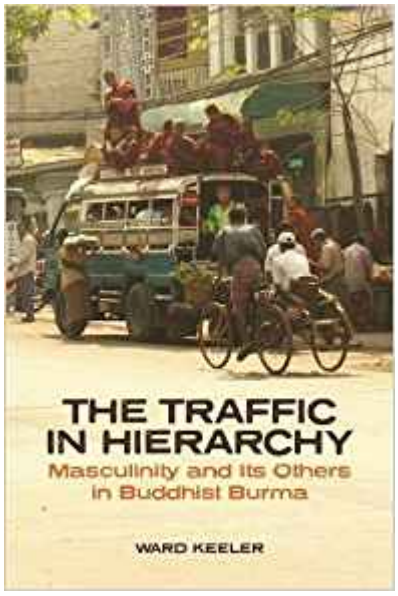

The Traffic in Hierarchy: Masculinity and Its Others in Buddhist Burma

by Ward Keeler
(University of Hawaii Press 2017)

Michael Walzer once began a book with the advice of a former teacher to "always begin negatively". Tell your readers what you are not going to do and it will relieve their minds, he says. Then they will be more inclined to accept what seems a modest project. Whether or not Ward Keeler had this writing strategy firmly in mind when he wrote the preface to *The Traffic in Hierarchy: Masculinity and Its Others in Buddhist Burma* (University of Hawaii Press, 2017), it's the one he adopts, and with the recommended effect. Anticipating that the reader picking up a book on Burma with both "hierarchy" and "masculinity" in its title might be looking for answers to the question of how and why military men dominated the country for so long, and how and why everyone else tolerated them for as long as they did, he tells the reader that he leaves it to them "to speculate as to how such notions as the workings of hierarchy or the location of power 'above one's head' encouraged… members of the former regime to impose control over the nation's populace with such ferocious complacency". His own concerns are more immediate and pedestrian, he says. Except, of course, they are much more than that. For as the reader turns the pages they are led through deceptively straightforward descriptions of both street and monastic life, into a theory of hierarchy and a study of masculinity that is at once in conversation with Keeler's many interlocutors in Burma, and with classics in anthropological inquiry.

Interview by Nick Cheesman
Listen **here**!

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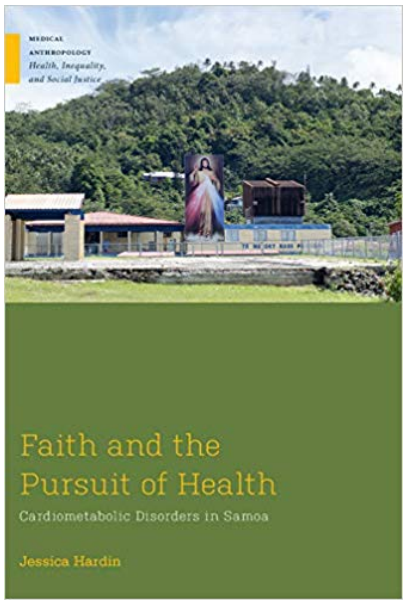

Faith and the Pursuit of Health: Cardiometabolic Disorders in Samoa
by Jessica Hardin
(Rutgers University Press 2018)

Jessica Hardin's new book *Faith and the Pursuit of Health: Cardiometabolic Disorders in Samoa* (Rutgers University Press, 2018) explores how Pentecostal Christians manage chronic illness in ways that sheds light on health disparities and social suffering in Samoa, a place where rates of obesity and related cardiometabolic disorders have reached population-wide levels. Pentecostals grapple with how to maintain the health of their congregants in an environment that fosters cardiometabolic disorders. They find ways to manage these forms of sickness and inequality through their churches and the friendships developed within these institutions. Examining how Pentecostal Christianity provides many Samoans with tools to manage day-to-day issues around health and sickness, Jessica Hardin argues for understanding the synergies between how Christianity

and biomedicine practice chronicity.

Interview by Dana Greenfield
Listen **here**!

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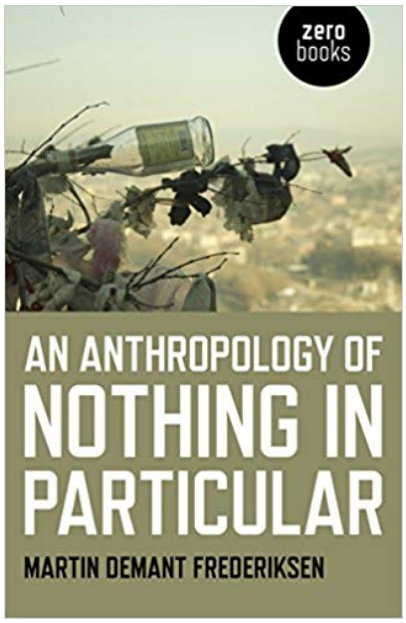

An Anthropology of Nothing in Particular
by Martin Demant Frederiksen
(Zero Books 2018)

An Anthropology of Nothing in Particular (Zero Books, 2018) is an "exploration of what goes missing when one looks for meaning" (p. 1). The book is both an experimental ethnography and a theoretical treatise on how we can understand and represent absence of meaning. Its author, Martin Demant Frederiksen, approaches the meaningless seriously as an ethnographic and experiential fact, refusing to explain what its ultimate meaning could be.

Interview by Carna Brkovic
Listen **here**!

http://traffic.megaphone.fm/LIT7318189824.mp3

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