The Bureaucratization of Utopia – A Report

Julie Billaud
November, 2018

Our students do not dream of global change anymore!

It is on these pessimistic words that [Alessandro Monsutti](#) opened our workshop « The Bureaucratization of Utopia: International Governance, Audit Cultures and Administrative subjectivities in the 21st Century », organized at the [Graduate Institute in Geneva](#) on June 29-30 in collaboration with Allegra Lab. During these two days, and with the financial support of the Swiss National Sciences

Foundation, twelve anthropologists and one historian from Switzerland, the UK, the US, Finland, Germany and France gathered to discuss the interplay between utopia and bureaucracy and to track the possibility of hope in the cracks of the global administrative processes that are their object of study.

The idea for this workshop came from a shared intuition that our world had reached a « post human rights » (hence a « post Utopian ») moment when the great ideals of the 21st century were gradually subsumed behind standardized formats and procedures. It also emerged out of the realization of a certain disconnect between the progressive ideals upheld by institutions of global governance and the rather dull nature of the bureaucratic labour that constitutes their everyday. Building on Anna Tsing's last book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, in which the author argues that precarity, indeterminacy and absence of control have become distinctive features of our time, Julie Billaud introduced the workshop by asking whether global governance could also be conceived as an inherently fragile field instead of a totalizing form of power.

Because International Organizations have a limited influence on the actions of states and on transnational corporations, because 'well established procedures can be incapacitated' (Niezen et Sapignoli 2017) due to an absence of adequate resources or the resistance of states to comply with them, and because the political field in which they operate is so scattered across space and time, the actions they initiate are narrowly circumscribed.

These vulnerabilities both call into question the ideology of permanent progress on which global governance is grounded but simultaneously opens room for 'world-making' beyond international governance's direct scope of influence and beyond its official intentions.

In this sense, anthropology as 'the art of noticing' (Tsing 2015), Billaud argued, is well equipped to look into the 'cracks' of international bureaucracies and reveal what such cracks enable and disable, and the kind of world(s) they contribute to create. This anthropological imagination can provide us not only with effective

theoretical tools to analyse the hopes and frustrations that global governance triggers but also with a hopeful method (Miyazaki 2006) for making our discipline more relevant in the field of international studies.

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In his presentation, Lukas Schemper explored the emergence of "altruistic communities" in the context of natural disasters. By tracing the history of the International Relief Union, an initiative launched by Giovanni Ciraolo – the President of the Italian Red Cross in the 1920s – Schemper demonstrated how early humanitarian endeavours gradually moved away from religious notions of charity to embrace the law as a means to universally implement justice. However, as the IRU scheme advanced in the bureaucracy to finally enter the League of Nations, the initial grand vision of its founder (international insurance scheme, emergency relief army) was radically watered down. Scattered across three bureaucracies (the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross Societies and the League of Nations), the IRU originally designed to channel international solidarity turned into a mere coordination mechanism between organizations which themselves faced serious management issues and which competed against each other. This exemplary case of bureaucratization of an ideal reveals how utopias always reflect the mind-set of the era in which they emerge. In this sense, the utopias of the inter-war period concretized through the establishment of a number of international institutions, reflected the belief that the world could be rationalized at a minimal cost via bureaucratic management.

Miia Halme-Tuomisaari offered a chronology of the 'global human rights phenomenon' delineating a gradual move away from the utopia of a 'human rights world' following World War II to the current normalization of human rights as a form of 'business as usual', what she calls the 'banalization of the good'. She emphasized the paradoxical subjectivities of modern days human rights bureaucrats: "passionately engaged" (like the scientists studied by Bruno Latour) in the cause of promoting human rights, they simultaneously have to remain "objectively detached" (like the lawyers working at the French *Conseil*

Constitutionnel, another object of Latour's study) in order to maintain an image of professionalism and impartiality. Because of their constant efforts at depersonalizing the content of the documents they produce, Halme-Tuomisaari pondered on the possibility of studying UN subjectivities in a context where 'everyone is a somebody but no one is really anybody'. In an attempt to bring nuance to Herzfeld's archetype of the 'burned out bureaucrat' (Herzfeld 1992), she suggested a typology of characters she encountered during her fieldwork at the UN Human Rights Committee: "the aspiring UN type" (the intern), "the old timer" (whose long time experience within the UN system enables him to maintain a vision of 'permanent progress'), "the NGO advocate" (who constantly struggles to make her voice heard in a forum primarily organized around states), and the "guardian of vision" (the UN insider, academic, expert who is also a believer). If cynicism and frustration are feelings commonly shared among UN bureaucrats, Halme-Tuomisaari's presentation gave the opportunity to reflect on their inner meaning: is cynicism the photographic negative of belief, as Lori Allen suggests in the case of the human rights activists working in Palestine (Allen 2013)?

> *Is cynicism what precisely creates attachment, especially for those who 'master' the field of human rights? What do these subjectivities tell us about power and hegemony?*

This is a question [Andrea Ballestero](#) tried to answer in her reflection on 'humanitarian water and techno-legal devices' in Costa Rica. Since the turn of the new millennium, the realization that drinkable water would soon be lacking led a number of actors, including Hollywood stars, church groups, governmental officials, and everyday citizens to campaign to define water as a human right. This endeavour further manifested itself at the World Water Forum in Mexico in 2006. While the Forum was an opportunity to disseminate knowledge, it was also a stage for making techno-legal devices circulate. These devises turned water into a human right via the use of statistics. As "material frontlines of norms" (Redfield 2016) such devices bear the traces of postcolonial and capitalist erasures,

embracing market logic while conveying laudable moral affects in the goal of improving human welfare. Looking at a) a formula, b) an index and c) a list devised by Costa Rican bureaucrats in charge of implementing 'the right to water', Ballestero argued that the future-making capacities of humanitarian mobilizations are deeply intertwined with these legal, epistemic, and economic artefacts. Because their actions are limited by existing structures, technocrats' capacity to project themselves in the future is severely constrained. Unable to carefully craft an image of the world they are in charge of creating, bureaucrats' vision of the future remains 'non-cinematic', reflecting their commitment to action for lack of political capacity to devise interventions.

Does this example illustrate the broader eviction of politics within the realm of global governance? Or is it a story of politics taking different forms?

The case of negotiations around Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) free zones in the Middle East presented by Gregoire Mallard highlighted similar strategies of apparent depoliticization. By using what Mallard calls 'forward analogies' (when Europe's past-present relation is compared to the Middle East's present-future relation), track 2 diplomats turn highly political negotiations into a forum for knowledge sharing via exchanges of 'failures' and 'bad practices'. This narrative strategy enables them to constitute the Middle East in contra-distinction with Europe, to avoid raising the issue of Israel's nuclear capacity and opening their own past to scrutiny. Indeed, such simulations help "constitute" the reality of regional orders when their ontological status as objects of deliberation and intervention is problematic.

Bringing insights from her fieldwork at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Giulia Scalettaris questioned the implicit assumption behind the workshop, namely the disconnect between bureaucracy and utopia. Indeed, bureaucracies are also an effective medium through which to organize collective action. Because current austerity measures call for the downsizing of public services (including universities) everywhere, we have to be wearied of discourses that use

stereotypical depictions of bureaucracies – as inherently ineffective and burdensome – in order to support neoliberal policies.

> *It is therefore necessary to make a distinction between bureaucracies that seek to deliver the common good and other bureaucratic processes (such as audits and other measurement techniques) that have deeply transformed the nature of administrative work, turning bureaucracies onto themselves in order to justify their own existence.*

Observing the ways in which organizations discursively construct utopias while systematically failing to implement them – taking into account the fact that in spite of these failures organizations continue to expand and gather support – could be a productive starting point for research. The borders of bureaucracies, Ballestero added, may be the right location from which to observe the unintended effects of administrative processes and to move away from the narrative of their inherent slowness so as to also conceive these forms of endurance as "weapons of the weak" in the face of quick neoliberal reforms.

Nayanika Mathur took the examples of accountability measures implemented in India since the 2000s – notably the Right to Information Act, the social welfare legislation and the 'digital India' plan – to highlight some of the paradoxical effects of the 'tyranny of transparency' (Strathern 2000a). Forced to produce an incessant flow of documents in a process that conflates accounting for accountability (and which is therefore 'extractive' by nature), Indian civil servants find themselves caught in the dynamics of 'deeper Weberian bureaucratization' that the Right to Information Act was initially meant to reform. Meanwhile, the utopian move to digitally mediated forms of interactions between citizens and the state in a context where such technologies do not yet exist has the ironic effect of making the seemingly benign public goods of transparency and accountability usher in a dystopic present.

Maria Sapignoli further explored the double edge nature of bureaucratic processes which respond to 'transparency' and 'participation' imperatives via her

ethnographic study of UN initiatives for indigenous people. Representatives of indigenous people engaging with UN processes find themselves caught in a bind between their aspirations as 'believers' and their duty to reach measurable goals as 'experts'. The legal technologies mobilised in order to create institutions and documents that represent "collective patterns of intention", while enlarging the field of participation, also trigger an iterative process that is structured by the field itself and which ultimately tends to erase indigenous people's voice. In spite of these structural constraints and the frustrations they produce, indigenous groups continue to engage with the UN in the hope to see the conditions of their communities improve.

> *Sapignoli qualified this continuous engagement as a desperate attempt to saturate the UN with indigenous people's own language – as a form of 'hopeful disenchantment'.*

Building on her 40-year long work experience with indigenous people, [Isabelle Schulte-Tenckhoff](#) argued that the 'mainstreaming' of indigenous people's issues within the UN system has initiated a shift from 'people' to 'issues' and a simultaneous de-radicalization of their agenda. Paradoxically, the increased participation of indigenous groups in UN processes (including their recent inclusion within the General Assembly) has watered down their initial claims for self-determination. These dynamics reflect the broader transformation of the UN from its initial diplomatic mandate, to a more bureaucratic organizational form from the 1990s onward, and into a meeting place for NGOs, academics and civil society organizations: what Thomas Weiss calls 'the third UN' (Weiss, Carayannis, et Jolly 2009). However, participation is hardly a neutral exercise. While the UN Working Group on indigenous people created in 1981 was, according to Tenkhoff, inclusive and utopian, now the UN seems to have created its own elite. Participation has therefore been a means to 'domesticate' indigenous people's claims. By creating a fellowship program on the occasion of the First Decade of Indigenous People, the UN has trained them on how to play by the rules of the system.

Tenckhoff's account is a powerful reminder of the standardizing power of international governance, which raises questions about the capacity of liberal spaces to produce radical thinking.

With [Shaila Galvin]'s presentation, we moved to the governance of organic farming in India, via the case of an agrarian utopia located in the Himalaya. The certification process of organic rice mostly relies on documents produced by farmers themselves as well as interviews conducted by auditors. Auditors' reliance on the oral and the written form means that the idea of organic agriculture is disconnected from what is found in the food. Compliance is measured according to documents and according to farmer's accounts of their agricultural practices, which are taken at face value. Ultimately, the document is the object of the certification and certification becomes a means to create a different form of utopia. This example demonstrates that because audit processes primarily rely on auditees' self-reporting practices, such mechanisms are inherently instable: they seek to evaluate farmers' efforts to comply instead of assessing the organic quality of the food itself.

[Elif Babul] further explored opacities produced by standardization processes via her ethnography of human rights training and bureaucratic reforms in Turkey. In a context where the language of human rights is perceived as subversive and where socialist politics is banned, the 'streamlining' of human rights has the paradoxical effect of creating frustrations. In order to neutralize these tensions, human rights have to be made relevant to be taught to different groups of people. Presented as sets of rules and ideas necessary for bureaucrats to consider in order to become professionals, civil society trainers have to use the politics of the apolitical to speak to the State. These efforts of 'translation' have nevertheless made human rights even more foreign to their target audience. The use of performances such as role-plays during which secrets and failures are shared creates a form of bureaucratic intimacy that tends to make participants embarrassed and frustrated. Simultaneously the training program contributes to the emergence of a shared understanding among bureaucrats and civil society

partners of the need to dissociate themselves from human rights in case the political tide turns.

The case of Greece's involvement in its first Universal Periodic Review (UPR) – a human rights monitoring mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council – in 2011, at a moment of economic collapse and drastic cuts in public expenditures, is another illustration brought by [Jane Cowan](#) of the selective visibility enabled by human rights auditing. During its first review, Greek citizen's endangered access to food, health, water, shelter, decent wages and working conditions were not mentioned and only concerns regarding the rights of migrants, refugees, and occasionally of Roma were raised. The reasons given for such an 'absence' were several but lack of time for NGOs, the National Human Rights Commission and state institutions to prepare their reports was a major factor. At its second review in 2015, however, Greece – under a new government more inclined to challenge austerity measures imposed by the troika – used a different strategy. Both civil society organizations and state institutions used the UPR to evaluate the human rights consequences of Troika-imposed austerity measures, as part of a longer effort to alter austerity policy. By sharing the responsibility of human rights violations with its international partners (European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund), the Greek delegation used the 'audit' not only as a means to review its own human rights performance but also as an opportunity to denounce the unfair governance regime to which it was subjected.

Julie Billaud pushed the conversation on 'audit cultures' (Strathern 2000b) further by comparing the monitoring practices of the UN Human Rights Council to the ones of the International Committee of the Red Cross. While highlighting fundamental differences between the two organizations – notably in their respective perceptions of the future – Billaud also identified converging trends – notably 1) the reliance on 'constructive dialogue' (UPR) or 'confidential dialogue' (ICRC) to foster compliance, 2) the importance of the predictability of procedures in insuring states' collaboration and 3) a push toward a greater use of quantitative data and statistics in the manufacturing of 'evidence'.

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As Alessandro Monsutti rightly argued to conclude the workshop:

"In a post-, post-Cold War world, all the utopias and the dreams that moved people in the 90s are still around, floating in the vocabulary of many UN agencies and NGOs but these ideas probably don't make people dream anymore. The workshop was a means to explore the everyday practices of these 'bureaucrats of big ideas.'"

Through the various ethnographic cases they explored, participants were able to highlight the tensions, contradictions and paradoxes that bureaucrats encounter when seeking to implement 'good governance' principles (such as 'transparency', 'accountability', 'participation'). Their contributions also underlined the ubiquitous presence of audit and other measurement techniques in the global governance of the world, forcing the various actors interacting in this field to develop administrative skills in order to preserve their audibility and remain relevant. What these trends seem to highlight is the increasing reliance on 'techno-legal devices', to use Ballestero's notion, (reports, indicators etc) to solve big world issues and to 'neutralise' politics. But shouldn't we rather conceive these dynamics as another expression of politics, the mere 'gloss of harmony' (Müller 2013) covering inherently political – and therefore controversial – issues? Aren't the frustrations of international experts and bureaucrats also a reflection of their genuine commitment to 'do the good' in spite of the myriad procedures that constantly limit their agency?

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The Gloss of Harmony

Taras Fedirko
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I spent much of my fieldwork at a department of the UK Government grappling with a confusing dynamic between civil servants I worked with, and their 'stakeholders' from the civil society and large businesses. At formal meetings about the policy that the Department implemented, those attending did their best to hide their feuds and divisive interests in order to create an atmosphere of consensus. After the meetings, be it during bureaucratic de-briefs or private phone calls, people mobilised all their knowledge of relationships among their colleagues, of their interests and conflicts, in order to decode what actually had been said and done in the formal settings of the meetings. If the policy was to be

implemented successfully, consensus and harmony had to reign in the assemblies. But it only made sense to people through the lens of the organisational backstage.

The accounts collected by Birgit Müller in the ten chapters of her volume *The Gloss of Harmony* provide for an interesting read that will resonate with the fieldwork experience of many researchers studying formal organisations. The essays persuasively explain how conflicts and tensions around the production of international norms are dissolved and dissipated by 'technical' means to generate consensus and make the world governable without really governing it. Authors have all conducted fieldwork within multilateral international organisations of the UN system that have little if any constraining mechanisms, yet are tasked with governing such important areas as human rights, protection of biodiversity, and environmental management. The lens of organisational ethnography has allowed researchers to follow policy negotiations at great length, and to account for how these negotiations relate to and enact institutional and normative frameworks of the organisations. As Müller puts it, the "chapters point to the disarticulation between practices of and in these organisations and their rationalising models" (p.3).
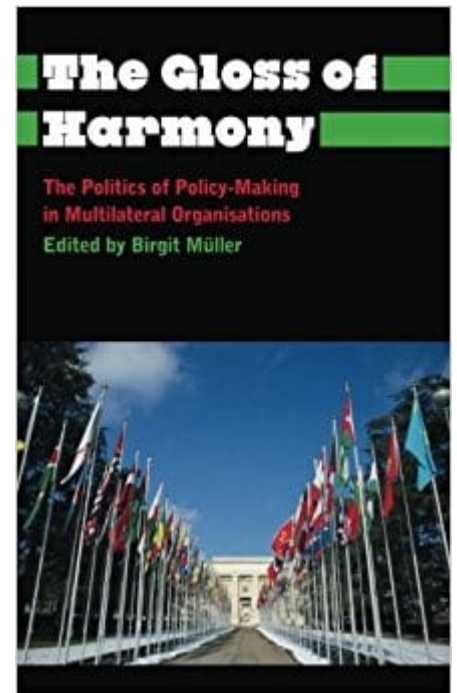
Focusing on mechanisms of governance that result from tensions between organisations' aspirations and goals, and their mandate, the authors describe the work that goes into negotiating policies by consensus.

For example, Marion Fresia (chapter three) focuses on the "making of global consensus" on refugee protection norms at the Executive Committee of UNHCR. Exploring perspectives of different actors involved in the "tense and fragmented arena" of negotiations (p.64), and relationships among them, Fresia suggests that

"international organisations […] formulate and implement norms and policies that cannot be described in a realist and instrumentalist way as the simple product of interstate bargaining or of western imperialism. Nor do they appear as the mere expression of the institutional interests of international experts or international organisations" (p.70, reference omitted). These norms and policies, she argues, result from a complex dynamic of relationships among different actors, who are also differentially involved in negotiations.

Similarly, Tobias Kelly (chapter six) describes how the bureaucratic procedures of the international system of human rights monitoring are not simply transparent forms of information-gathering, but can hide as much as they reveal. In particular, Kelly argues that "[a]s a result of the technical ways in which human rights obligations are interpreted, the shame of torture is dispersed into arguments about procedure" (p.135). In her essay on the genealogy of the international oversight of rights (chapter five), Jane Cowan traces changes in the value placed upon organisational transparency. She observes that whereas in the Minorities Section of the League of Nations behind-closed-doors negotiations were a preferred method, in the present-day UN Universal Periodic Review transparency is performed to the global public, even though it comes with its own obfuscations (p.126).

Like Cowan, who describes the complexity of social arrangements through which the states mobilise support and contest attempts of international organisations to exercise influence, Brigitta Häuser-Schaublin pays attention to brokering and delicate negotiations about the restitution of cultural artefacts at UNESCO. Suggesting that such negotiations are laden with powerful symbolism — e.g. of decolonisation, or loss of face and shame for former colonial powers — the authors conclude that the governance of artefacts' return deals not just with the practicalities of return as such, but also with the symbolic value attached to contested artefacts.

Revealing the social and normative complexity of international norms of soft law, essays by Fresia, Bendix (chapter one), Cowan, Kelly, and Hauser-Shäublin

complicate our understanding of the organisations they study, and of the relationships between norms, official policy documents, and practices of knowledge formation. The chapters by Müller and MacDonald focus on the other end of the spectrum, looking at the practical implications of the "gloss of harmony" at sites of policy implementation.

All of the essays explore bureaucratic practices and political interests through which policy decisions and blueprints are articulated and made coherent. In this, they source their inspiration from David Mosse's (2005) work on development policy. Thus, in her introduction, Müller suggests that the volume belongs to the line of organisational anthropology that instead of showing how an institution thinks, "explore[s] how people think and act inside the organisation" (p.5). This is refreshing, as much of the existing literature on the topic tends to adopt a critical stance that reduces the complexity of organisational sociality to either assumed political or economic interests, or analytically discernible outcomes, such as the promotion of neoliberalism.

Yet, although describing and explaining the complexity of the social lives of policy in international organisations, these rich and insightful accounts tell their readers little by way of ethnographic exploration of how exactly "people think and act inside organisation". Complexity here is an effect of juxtaposition of actors' perspectives, rather than an artefact of detailed description of personal trajectories, actions and aspirations. This certainly does not take away from the analytical merits of the volume, but a more ethnographic description of what goes on at meetings and offices, of the mundane work of policy writing and negotiation, and of the material media through which this work takes place, would have only made it better.

In my opinion, the chapters are at their best when they discuss exactly what might seem mundane, uninteresting, and intentionally devoid of conflict.

Document form, the specificities of technical interpretation of policy "language", bureaucratic procedures and expert knowledge all fall into this category.

Antithetical to politics because they are "technical", they are but politics by other means, we are told, as for example in Peter Bille Larsen's chapter on best practice guidelines on environmental management. Larsen (chapter four) interestingly characterises the non-binding normativity of guideline documents as unstable, stating that "[t]heir non-definition may in fact be seen as a defining quality or property allowing for their elasticity and perceived utility" (p.79). This insight into the form of international soft norms goes some way in explaining how the norms hold across contexts and for different actors. Larson's argument is reminiscent of the work of Annelise Riles (2000) and Tess Lea (2008), both of whom showed, for the UN Conference on Women and the Australian Territorial Health Service respectively, how consensus is often a matter of the form of documents, and the affordances that this form possesses. Larson's argument also echoes that of the other contributors (esp. Bendix, Fresia, Kelly), who, in Müller's words, describe how policy "[d]rafts are tamed until they become acceptable and polite, cleansed of their conflictive elements and rendered 'technical'" (p.8, reference omitted).

At the same time, looking for politics, the book seems to overlook what else could be at stake for people who inhabit and transit through organisations in question, or even how exactly these people relate to the politics of policymaking that the authors identify. Equally, the reader won't find much about ethical, epistemic or aesthetic commitments that these people might have to, say, consensus decision-making or technical means that help them achieve consensus.

This might well be an effect of the peculiarities of fieldwork in international organisations, which as Bendix says is ethnographically taxing. The dynamics of communication is dense, people are many and difficult to follow, and access is difficult to obtain. The editor and some of the contributors explicitly acknowledge that "doors to negotiation rooms [can be] closed to the external observer" (p.6). This acknowledgment, however, begs a question: how do the formal settings of meetings and committees, which the researchers observe and analyse, relate to the parts of organisational 'lives' that remains invisible to the ethnographic eye? What do we lose by not being able to observe the mundane flow of organisational

sociality, and analysing instead the public performances of organisations at meetings? Where do the meetings enacting the gloss of harmony, which the essays so artfully deconstruct, fit in terms of broader processes of organisation? It's difficult to answer without access to that which remains behind the closed doors.

The Gloss of Harmony doubtlessly is a useful book, for it demonstrates both the strengths of ethnographic study of international organisations, and the limits of our method. It is a rich collection, and its essays cover a lot of ground and are thus difficult to do justice to. All in all, it is a necessary read to those working in similar fields, especially because of the way the essays ground the production of international norms in the organisational dynamics of UN institutions.

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Essential Readings #ErkkoLecture

Jane Cowan
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I am rereading some of my own articles and chapters as I prepare for today's lecture, and I thought these four might be useful for any interested readers.

The very first article I published is called [‘Who's Afraid of Violent Language? Honour, Sovereignty and Claims Making at the League of Nations’, Anthropological Theory 3(3): 271-291, 2003](). This article gives a full description of the minority petition procedure and especially the 5 ‘conditions of receivability’ that a petition had to fulfil in order to move to the next step. In particular, it considers the 4th condition, that a petition ‘must abstain from violent language’. I consider the ‘puzzle’ of ‘violent language’ — what it might mean — by looking at diplomatic language, disputes over ‘improper’ speech within diplomatic and bureaucratic contexts and the very different codes of political rhetoric and social reform. I place the discussions of language and procedure in the context of a description of the everyday practices of supervision by members of the League Secretariat's Minorities Section and disagreements around practice: in this case, on how strict or lenient to be in relation to the ‘violent language’ of petitioners.

[‘Fixing National Subjects in the 1920s Southern Balkans: Also an International Practicethe Plenary Session of the Lausanne Conference’, American Ethnologist 35(2): 338-356, 2008]() focuses on the Greco-Bulgarian Voluntary and Reciprocal Emigration scheme agreed between Greece and Bulgaria in Neuilly-sur-Seine in 1919, and shows how international civil servants (League personnel) both supervised states to ensure they met their minorities treaties obligations but also collaborated with states in helping them to regulate their population's differences.

Specifically, the League worked with Greece and Bulgaria in setting up bureaucratic procedures for male heads of households to declare themselves (and their families) as belonging to ‘the Greek minority’ in Bulgaria or ‘the Bulgarian minority’ in Greece, which enabled them to move to their supposed national ‘home’.

I begin the article with the Manaki brothers, turn-of-the-century photographers and cinematographers which Romanian, Greek and Macedonian writers have all claimed to be ‘our own’ people, as figures for the kind of person that authorities found frustratingly difficult to deal with in these population schemes (of voluntary or compulsory ‘exchange’), because their nationality was uncertain, contested or

changed during their lifetime.

['The Supervised State', Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power 14(5): 545-578, 2007](#) looks at an 'arresting conjuncture', the fact that the international community's involvement in states' affairs frequently coalesces around a state's management of internal difference. I look at 'the supranational' (with the League of Nations and the European Union as my cases) as a form of governmentality, taking as my example the ways that 'minorities' were reconfigured in two post-imperial moments (post WW1 and post-1989).

Finally, the chapter I wrote for Marie Dembour and Toby Kelly's book, [Paths to International Justice: Social and Legal Perspectives](#), is key as well. I called it 'The success of failure? Minority petitions at the League of Nations'. Here I query 'failure' and the importance of interrogating it, including times when 'failure' might actually lead to, or even 'be', 'success'. I like the fact that all of this speculation is based on a hunch after reading the papers in the archives. I really believe in empirical work—it can lead us to unexpected insights.

Apart from these four articles, I would also direct people to the work of two historians who I greatly admire:

Mark Mazower, 1997. 'Minorities and the League of Nations in interwar Europe', Daedalus 126(2): 47-63.

—-2004. 'The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933-1950', The Historical Journal 47(2): 379-398.

Susan Pedersen, 2007. 'Back to the League of Nations', The American Historical Review 112(4): 1091-1117.

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Jane Cowan on the Origins of 'Minority'

Pekka Rautio
November, 2018

Jane Cowan, the Jane and Aatos Erkko Visiting Professor in Studies on Contemporary Society at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies for the academic year 2018–2019, is currently investigating historical junctures concerning international human rights, the rights of minorities and minority

citizenship. Jane is particularly familiar with the situation in the region of Macedonia.

Jane Cowan has been researching minority citizenship in the context of the League of Nations as part of the pre-history of the current human rights system.

The League of Nations was an international organisation established after the First World War whose aims included disarmament, international dispute settlement and the improvement of living standards. After the Second World War, the League of Nations was succeeded by the United Nations.

Diplomats and League of Nations international civil servants cooperated with European states with the aim of maintaining regional stability and guaranteeing a permanent peace.

From 1920 to 1935, the League supervised what were known as "minority states", mainly located on the eastern borders of Europe. After the First World War, these states were compelled to accept treaties concerning the rights and protections of those citizens who differed from the majority by virtue of their language, religion or ethnicity. This moment thus saw the introduction of the term 'minority' as a political-legal category.

Why was the minority supervision mechanism of the League of Nations set up?

"The supervision mechanism and indeed, the League of Nations itself, was set up at a moment of fundamental transformation in Europe from empires to nation-states. The Hapsburg, Ottoman, Hohenzollern and Romanov empires, all of them multi-religious and multilingual, were under stress from nationalist movements," says Cowan, professor of social anthropology.

The goal for supporters of nationalism was for people who were 'similar' to live

as a 'nation', a distinct political entity with territory of its own.

"Finland was one such nation, achieving independence in 1917," Cowan points out.

Following the First World War, the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 consolidated the political development of a Europe of nation-states.

"Faced with having to determine and confirm new state borders, the diplomats realised that this ideal of a pure nation-state was impossible, whether defined by criteria of language, religion or ethnicity," says Cowan.

This observation resulted in the idea that certain nations should sign a treaty to affirm full political and civil rights to the ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities living in their territory, and also to give them some special rights related to the use of their own language.

"By 1924, fifteen states had accepted minority treaty obligations: Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Turkey, the Serbo-Croat-Slovene Kingdom and Germany," Cowan lists.

Selective supervision

The League of Nations were responsible to ensure that the signatories complied with the treaties. The objective of the supervision mechanism was to prevent inter-state conflicts.

League supervision was nonetheless very selective. Only certain states were required to sign the legal treaties promising fair treatment of minorities. These obligations did not apply to other countries, such as Great Britain, wrestling at the same time with its Irish question.

According to Cowan, some revolutionary groups also used the supervision

mechanisms for their own purposes: rather than accepting being described as a minority, they used it to continue their ongoing struggle for self-determination.

"Until recently, the dominant narrative dismissed the League of Nations as a 'failure' and described human rights, and the United Nations' human rights system, as if they were created *ex nihilo*. Yet it is easy to see that many of the League's institutional structures and procedures were adapted from the League to the United Nations," Cowan explains.

Minority rights or human rights?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, signified the reformulation of minority rights.

"It was felt that minority rights as such were no longer needed, because the new set of human rights covered everything," Cowan says.

In practice, equality for minorities on the national level has proven challenging, so minority rights remain an issue for the UN.

"Even today, there is not a fully agreed definition of the term 'minority' at the UN," she points out.

The case of Macedonia – background for the naming dispute

In her research on the minority supervision mechanism of the League of Nations, Cowan has paid particular attention to the complex situation of Macedonia. The book *Macedonia: The politics of identity and difference* (Pluto 2000), edited by Cowan, is one of the fruits of her labour.

"The territorial extent of Macedonia as a region has long been disputed. There have been several elements to the contestation over what Macedonia is and to

whom it belongs," Cowan explains.

During antiquity, the region was not understood in terms of the kinds of distinct borders now in use. When nationalist movements were on the rise in the 19th and early 20th centuries, the region was under the control of the Ottoman Empire.

"In that time, supporters of the Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian movements, and also a 'Macedonia for Macedonians' movement, all claimed that Macedonia should be 'theirs'," Cowan adds.

The different nationalist groups based their justifications on language, religion, ethnic origin, national consciousness or history, selecting the criterion that best supported their claim.

According to Cowan, the current controversy over who has the right to use the word 'Macedonia' is related to unresolved issues in the interwar period, though also to later events such as the Greek Civil War. The right to use the name is linked with territorial claims, which have escalated at various points of time into violent armed conflicts. Most recently, the territorial borders changed in connection with the break-up of the Yugoslav Federation.

"Finally, the name issue is also about identity and history. Many Greeks feel that Macedonia is historically Greek because of Greeks being there before the Slavs. As long-time inhabitants of the territory, citizens of the Republic of Macedonia believe, equally strongly, that they have, at long last, the right to be recognised as an independent state by the international community. Although many in both countries support the currently negotiated compromise name of 'Republic of North Macedonia', nationalists on both sides are outraged," says Cowan.

Historical archives through the eyes of an anthro-

pologist

Jane Cowan will give her inaugural lecture, *An anthropologist in the archives: Reading letters to the League of Nations on minorities and Macedonia,* on 27 November at the University of Helsinki. The lecture will explore the struggles around minorities and minority citizenship in the Balkans, especially in Macedonia, as seen through letters to the League of Nations and the encounters they generated.

"In my lecture, I will explain how letters and petitions addressed to the League of Nations were processed at the time by a small team of bureaucrats, how the term 'minority' was defined, asserted and resisted by the various parties, and the effects this had on subject-making processes.

"Over forty years of field work experience in the Balkans has affected my reading of archival records. I am aware that although the letters I am studying portray the boundaries between groups as clear and absolute, people in the region do not necessarily think this way. The ways they describe themselves may change depending on context and audience, and also may change over time," says Cowan.

The interview was originally published on 12 November 2018 on [the Helsinki Collegium of Advanced Studies website.](#)

[Featured image](#) by Mika Federley.

Call for Reviews: Ethnographies of

the United States

Allegra
November, 2018

While our newsfeed is filled with content related to the mid-term elections in the United States, President Trump's xenophobic and racist discourse, and his politics of injury and death on the US-Mexico border,

there is an evident need to learn more about the context within which these politics occur, and it is vital to gain a better understanding of the consequences they produce.

We are thrilled about these ethnographies hot off the press that in different ways

address the various terrains that these political debates aim to tackle. We are looking for fellow scholars who are interested in reviewing these exciting ethnographies that explore imperial formations related to the politics of the United States in general, and the various themes surrounding the United States-Mexico border in particular. Our list of works include [an ethnography of emergency responders on the US-Mexico border](#) (Jusionyte); [a study that engages with the lives of those who have been deported](#) (Cadwell); [an ethnography of the discourses about migration and *el Norte* in a small industrial town Uriangato in Mexico](#) (Parsons Dick); and [a collection of ethnographies discussing the impacts of imperialist military and political interventions](#) (McGranahan and Collins eds.)

We have also included ethnographies that engage with societal issues pertaining to racism, space, gender and religion in the various regions of the United States. [An ethnography of African American queer women in the American South](#) shows how they experience racial, sexual, gender, and class identities (Patrick Johanson), [a study of public schools in Chicago](#) reveals patterns of systemic racism and inequality – and the ongoing struggle against them (Ewing), [an ethnography of the teaching of college writing in a prison](#) tells us an untold story of people who are invisible to the general public (Perry), and [the ethnography of the Black Pentecostal Church Coalition](#) not only pays attention to gender and race but spirituality and faith too (Lewin).

Our review guidelines:

As we receive many requests for reviews, please write 2-3 sentences why you should be reviewing this book, indicating how it relates to your own research or interests.

Please send your expression of interest to: reviews@allegralaboratory.net

When submitting the review, please follow our guidelines:

The review is to be written within three months from the dispatch of the book.

Spelling: British English. Please use –ise and not –ize word endings.

Word limit: 750-1500 words.
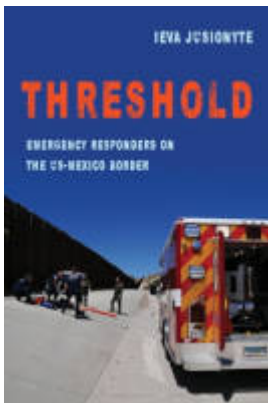
Font: Times New Roman.

Size: 12.

Line Spacing: 1,5

No footnotes.

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

Do not forget to include your name, (academic) affiliation, a photograph of yourself and a short bio of 2-3 sentences.

[Jusionyte, Ieva. 2018. *Threshold: Emergency Responders on the US-Mexico Border*. University of California Press.](#)

Emergency responders on the US-Mexico border operate at the edges of two states. They rush patients to hospitals across country lines, tend to the broken bones of migrants who jump over the wall, and put out fires that know no national boundaries. Paramedics and firefighters on both sides of the border are tasked with saving lives and preventing disasters in the harsh terrain at the center of divisive national debates.

Ieva Jusionyte's firsthand experience as an emergency responder provides the

background for her gripping examination of the politics of injury and rescue in the militarized region surrounding the US-Mexico border. Operating in this area, firefighters and paramedics are torn between their mandate as frontline state actors and their responsibility as professional rescuers, between the limits of law and pull of ethics. From this vantage point they witness what unfolds when territorial sovereignty, tactical infrastructure, and the natural environment collide. Jusionyte reveals the binational brotherhood that forms in this crucible to stand in the way of catastrophe. Through beautiful ethnography and a uniquely personal perspective, Threshold provides a new way to understand politicized issues ranging from border security and undocumented migration to public access to healthcare today.

[Caldwell, Beth C. . 2019. *Deported Americans: Life after Deportation to Mexico*. Duke University Press.](#)
(Forthcoming, April 2019)

When Gina was deported to Tijuana, Mexico, in 2011, she left behind her parents, siblings, and children, all of whom are U.S. citizens. Despite having once had a green card, Gina was removed from the only country she had ever known. In *Deported Americans* legal scholar and former public defender Beth C. Caldwell tells Gina's story alongside those of dozens of other Dreamers, who are among the hundreds of thousands who have been deported to Mexico in recent years. Many of them had lawful status, held green cards, or served in the U.S. military. Now, they have been banished, many with no hope of lawfully returning. Having interviewed over 100 deportees and their families, Caldwell traces deportation's long-term consequences—such as depression, drug use, and homelessness—on

both sides of the border. Showing how U.S. deportation law systematically fails to protect the rights of immigrants and their families, Caldwell challenges traditional notions of what it means to be an American and recommends legislative and judicial reforms to mitigate the injustices suffered by the millions of U.S. citizens affected by deportation.
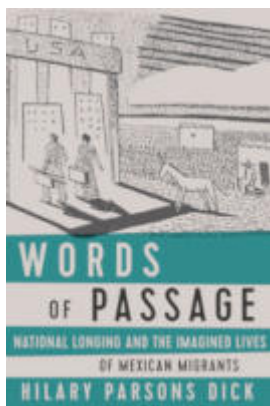

Parsons Dick, Hilary. 2018. Words of Passage: National Longing and the Imagined Lives of Mexican Migrants. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Migration fundamentally shapes the processes of national belonging and socioeconomic mobility in Mexico—even for people who never migrate or who return home permanently. Discourse about migrants, both at the governmental level and among ordinary Mexicans as they envision their own or others' lives in "El Norte," generates generic images of migrants that range from hardworking family people to dangerous lawbreakers. These imagined lives have real consequences, however, because they help to determine who can claim the resources that facilitate economic mobility, which range from state-sponsored development programs to income earned in the North.

Words of Passage is the first full-length ethnography that examines the impact of migration from the perspective of people whose lives are affected by migration, but who do not themselves migrate. Hilary Parsons Dick situates her study in the small industrial city of Uriangato, in the state of Guanajuato. She analyzes the discourse that circulates in the community, from state-level pronouncements about what makes a "proper" Mexican to working-class people's talk about

migration. Dick shows how this migration discourse reflects upon and orders social worlds long before—and even without—actual movements beyond Mexico. As she listens to men and women trying to position themselves within the migration discourse and claim their rights as "proper" Mexicans, she demonstrates that migration is not the result of the failure of the Mexican state but rather an essential part of nation-state building.
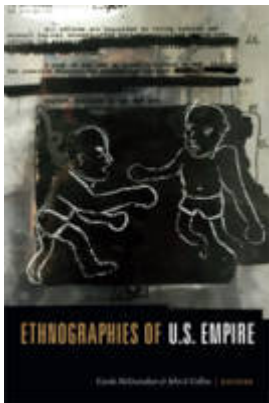
[McGranahan, Carole and Collins, John F.. 2018. *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire.* Duke University Press.](#)

How do we live in and with empire? The contributors to *Ethnographies of U.S. Empire* pursue this question by examining empire as an unequally shared present. Here empire stands as an entrenched, if often invisible, part of everyday life central to making and remaking a world in which it is too often presented as an aberration rather than as a structuring condition. This volume presents scholarship from across U.S. imperial formations: settler colonialism, overseas territories, communities impacted by U.S. military action or political intervention, Cold War alliances and fissures, and, most recently, new forms of U.S. empire after 9/11. From the Mohawk Nation, Korea, and the Philippines to Iraq and the hills of New Jersey, the contributors show how a methodological and theoretical commitment to ethnography sharpens all of our understandings of the novel and timeworn ways people live, thrive, and resist in the imperial present.

Contributors: Kevin K. Birth, Joe Bryan, John F. Collins, Jean Dennison, Erin Fitz-Henry, Adriana María Garriga-López, Olívia Maria Gomes da Cunha, Matthew

Gutmann, Ju Hui Judy Han, J. Kehaulani Kauanui, Eleana Kim, Heonik Kwon, Soo Ah Kwon, Darryl Li, Catherine Lutz, Sunaina Maira, Carole McGranahan, Sean T. Mitchell, Jan M. Padios, Melissa Rosario, Audra Simpson, Ann Laura Stoler, Fa'anofo Lisaclaire Uperesa, David Vine.
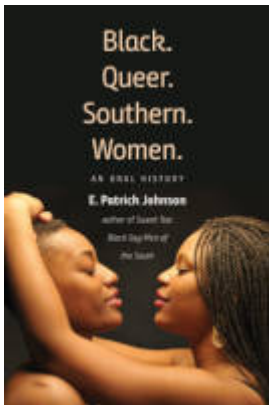
Johanson, Patrick E. 2018. Black. Queer. Southern. Women. Chapel Hill, NC: University of Northern Carolina Press.

Drawn from the life narratives of more than seventy African American queer women who were born, raised, and continue to reside in the American South, this book powerfully reveals the way these women experience and express racial, sexual, gender, and class identities–all linked by a place where such identities have generally placed them on the margins of society. Using methods of oral history and performance ethnography, E. Patrick Johnson's work vividly enriches the historical record of racialized sexual minorities in the South and brings to light the realities of the region's thriving black lesbian communities.

At once transcendent and grounded in place and time, these narratives raise important questions about queer identity formation, community building, and power relations as they are negotiated within the context of southern history. Johnson uses individual stories to reveal the embedded political and cultural ideologies of the self but also of the listener and society as a whole. These breathtakingly rich life histories show afresh how black female sexuality is and always has been an integral part of the patchwork quilt that is southern culture.
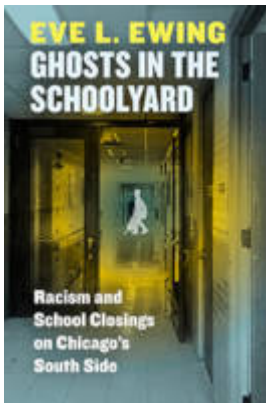
Ewing, Eve L. 2018. "Ghosts in Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

"Failing schools. Underprivileged schools. Just plain *bad* schools."

That's how Eve L. Ewing opens *Ghosts in the Schoolyard*: describing Chicago Public Schools from the outside. The way politicians and pundits and parents of kids who attend other schools talk about them, with a mix of pity and contempt.

But Ewing knows Chicago Public Schools from the inside: as a student, then a teacher, and now a scholar who studies them. And that perspective has shown her that public schools are not buildings full of failures—they're an integral part of their neighborhoods, at the heart of their communities, storehouses of history and memory that bring people together.

Never was that role more apparent than in 2013 when Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced an unprecedented wave of school closings. Pitched simultaneously as a solution to a budget problem, a response to declining enrollments, and a chance to purge bad schools that were dragging down the whole system, the plan was met with a roar of protest from parents, students, and teachers. But if these schools were so bad, why did people care so much about keeping them open, to the point that some would even go on a hunger strike?

Ewing's answer begins with a story of systemic racism, inequality, bad faith, and distrust that stretches deep into Chicago history. Rooting her exploration in the historic African American neighborhood of Bronzeville, Ewing reveals that this issue is about much more than just schools. Black communities see the closing of their schools—schools that are certainly less than perfect but that are *theirs*—as

one more in a long line of racist policies. The fight to keep them open is yet another front in the ongoing struggle of black people in America to build successful lives and achieve true self-determination.
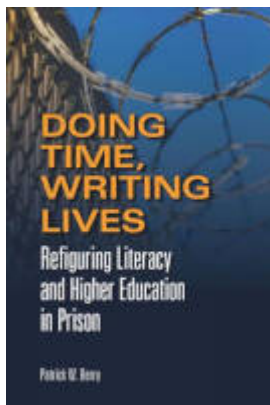
Perry, Patrick W. 2018. Doing Time, Writing Lives: Refiguring Literacy and Higher Education in Prison. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Doing Time, Writing Lives offers a much-needed analysis of the teaching of college writing in U.S. prisons, a racialized space that—despite housing more than 2 million people—remains nearly invisible to the general public. Through the examination of a college-in-prison program that promotes the belief that higher education in prison can reduce recidivism and improve life prospects for the incarcerated and their families, author Patrick W. Berry exposes not only incarcerated students' hopes and dreams for their futures but also their anxieties about whether education will help them.

Combining case studies and interviews with the author's own personal experience of teaching writing in prison, this book chronicles the attempts of incarcerated students to write themselves back into a society that has erased their lived histories. It challenges polarizing rhetoric often used to describe what literacy can and cannot deliver, suggesting more nuanced and ethical ways of understanding literacy and possibility in an age of mass incarceration.
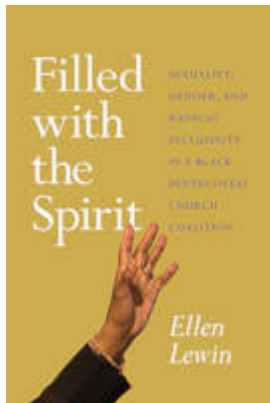
Lewin, Ellen. 2018. Filled with the Spirit: Sexuality, Gender and Radical Inclusivity in a Black Pentecostal Church Coalition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

In 2001, a collection of open and affirming churches with predominantly African American membership and a Pentecostal style of worship formed a radically new coalition. The group, known now as the Fellowship of Affirming Ministries or TFAM, has at its core the idea of "radical inclusivity": the powerful assertion that everyone, no matter how seemingly flawed or corrupted, has holiness within. Whether you are LGBT, have HIV/AIDS, have been in prison, abuse drugs or alcohol, are homeless, or are otherwise compromised and marginalized, TFAM tells its people, you are one of God's creations.

In *Filled with the Spirit*, Ellen Lewin gives us a deeply empathetic ethnography of the worship and community central to TFAM, telling the story of how the doctrine of radical inclusivity has expanded beyond those it originally sought to serve to encompass people of all races, genders, sexualities, and religious backgrounds. Lewin examines the seemingly paradoxical relationship between TFAM and traditional black churches, focusing on how congregations and individual members reclaim the worship practices of these churches and simultaneously challenge their authority. The book looks closely at how TFAM worship is legitimated and enhanced by its use of gospel music and considers the images of food and African American culture that are central to liturgical imagery, as well as how understandings of personal authenticity tie into the desire to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Throughout, Lewin takes up what has been mostly missing from our discussions of race, gender, and sexuality—close attention to spirituality and faith.

Featured image (cropped) by *The All-Nite Images* (flickr, *CC BY-SA 2.0*)

Social movements, Landscape Studies and more

Allegra
November, 2018

While November might hold a questionable position as the gloomiest month of the year for many, the darkening late Autumn days are a perfect moment to prepare yourself for some exciting academic enlightenment. This month you might find yourself interested in the history and aftermath of different social movements, or how urban art aligns with them. We also have highlighted events dealing with the vast field of South Asian studies and how landscape and citizenry relate with each other.

As always, if you want your event to feature in our next events list or if you wish to write a short report, don't hesitate to get in touch with our events assistant at events@allegralaboratory.net

Symposium: **Landscape Citizenships**

16 November 2018, Conway Hall, London, UK

Landscape Citizenships: Grounded in the discourses of ecological, watershed, and bioregional citizenships, this symposium seeks to evaluate belonging through the idea of landscape as landship. This describes substantive, mutually constitutive relations between people and place. The emerging fields of landscape justice and landscape democracy form a background against which to examine issues from folkways to the virtual, migration and inhabitation, nationalism, and speculative futures. [more]

Conference: SASA 2019: Taking South Asia to the World

1-3 March 2019, Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California, USA

South Asia: 5,000 years of history and home to a quarter of the earth's population and its fastest-growing major economy. Its impact and its output touch virtually all countries on earth. South Asianists within colleges and universities globally ignite and fan flames of interest in the region. They take South Asia to the world. Each year leading South Asia scholars come together at SASA's annual conference to share knowledge and insights about South Asia's rich and unrivaled past, its bold and remarkable present, its challenges, and its soaring prospects for the future. Cultural and social sidebar events at conferences include live performances, exhibits, cuisine from the region, annual Exemplar Award presentations, and multiple networking opportunities.

Now in its second decade, the South Asian Studies Association annual conferences have long advanced and presented research in the history, humanities, and social sciences of South Asia. Beginning with our SASA 2018 Conference, however, SASA expanded this mission to include innovative Plenary Sessions which featured leaders from within South Asia-centered business and trade, government, NGOs and philanthropy. This groundbreaking blend was heralded as an unqualified success (For details of SASA 2018 see www.SAsia.org). SASA 2019 will again address and celebrate South Asia's place in the world and leading scholars and academicians will again gather and present papers and talks within traditional academic tracks. And we will again present Plenary Sessions looking at South Asia's business and trade, governance, NGOs, philanthropy, and higher education systems and institutions. For South Asianists, SASA 2019 at Claremont McKenna College will be the not-to-be-missed event of the year. [more]

Deadline for submission of proposals: Friday, January 4, 2019. Early submissions are greatly encouraged.

International Conference: [Stonewall at 50 and Beyond: Interrogating the Legacy and Memory of the 1969 Riots](#)

3-5 June, 2019, the universities of Paris-Est Créteil and Paris-Dauphine, France

The Stonewall riots are fraught with a conflictual memory. A standard narrative might read as follows: In the night of June 27, 1969, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a Greenwich Village bar on Christopher Street in New York, refuse to endure yet another occurrence of the police harassment they routinely faced. For five days and nights, the neighborhood was the scene of a confrontation between rioters and the police. In the following weeks and months, this upsurge reinforced emerging liberation movements that coalesced into a diverse political force. The events were celebrated the following year and have since generally been presented as "the birth of the gay liberation movement" that is commemorated in today's yearly LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) pride marches.

On the fiftieth anniversary of Stonewall, this conference aims to shed critical light on this major event and its possible effects on the development of LGBTQ mobilizations around the world. It seeks to investigate the processes of memorialization, as well as the political legacy and the cultural and activist representations of Stonewall.[more]

Deadline for application: 1 December 2018

International Conference: [War and Social Movements](#)

10 May 2019, Graduate Center of the City University of New York, New York City, NY, USA

Organized movements for social change have often preceded or immediately followed periods of warfare. The temporal proximity of social movements and warfare raises several interesting questions. Among others, in what ways have movements for social change been linked to periods of violent conflict? How might war contribute to the expansion or limitation of rights for marginalized and oppressed groups? How does warfare shape the attitudes and strategies of social activists in local, transnational, and global contexts? This inter-disciplinary conference seeks to examine these and other relevant questions.

The conference welcomes papers from scholars working on a broad range of topics—from any geographic area or time period—that address the connections between movements for social change and periods of warfare. Paper topics may include but are not limited to community development, concepts of citizenship, environmental awareness, identity formation, labor organizing, and human rights. [More]

Deadline for application: 31 December 2018

Conference: [Rebel Streets: Urban Space, Art, and Social Movements](#)

28-29 May 2019, University of Tours, France

Art's practical place in reconstituting the urban space, as one of the defining elements of urban culture, renders a twofold role. The role of art in the neoliberal urban planning shows that art is an integral part of current capitalist processes that are turning the neoliberal art subject in a source of capital—both as a resource for tourism and a real estate investment. However, recent research has found that arts and art establishments are not as significant in gentrification processes as before (Grodach, Fostor, Murdoch 2018). Indeed, art has been both a product of and a response to the unequal distribution of resources and visibility in the city through the processes of new urban planning. For example, a growing resistance against neoliberal urbanism in Europe (Colomb & Novy 2016) demonstrates the relationship of artist communities and neighborhood organizations and challenges the prescriptive approaches to art's role in neoliberal aestheticization.

Rebel Streets conference aims to shift the focus from a rather disempowering critical perspective towards urban art to one that stresses its aesthetical and political powers as a part of the urban social resistance. We ask participants to investigate the hypothesis that the aesthetic reconfiguration of the neoliberal city does not only allow for a hegemonic restructuring of the urban environment, but it also facilitates the growth of counter-hegemonic resistance.
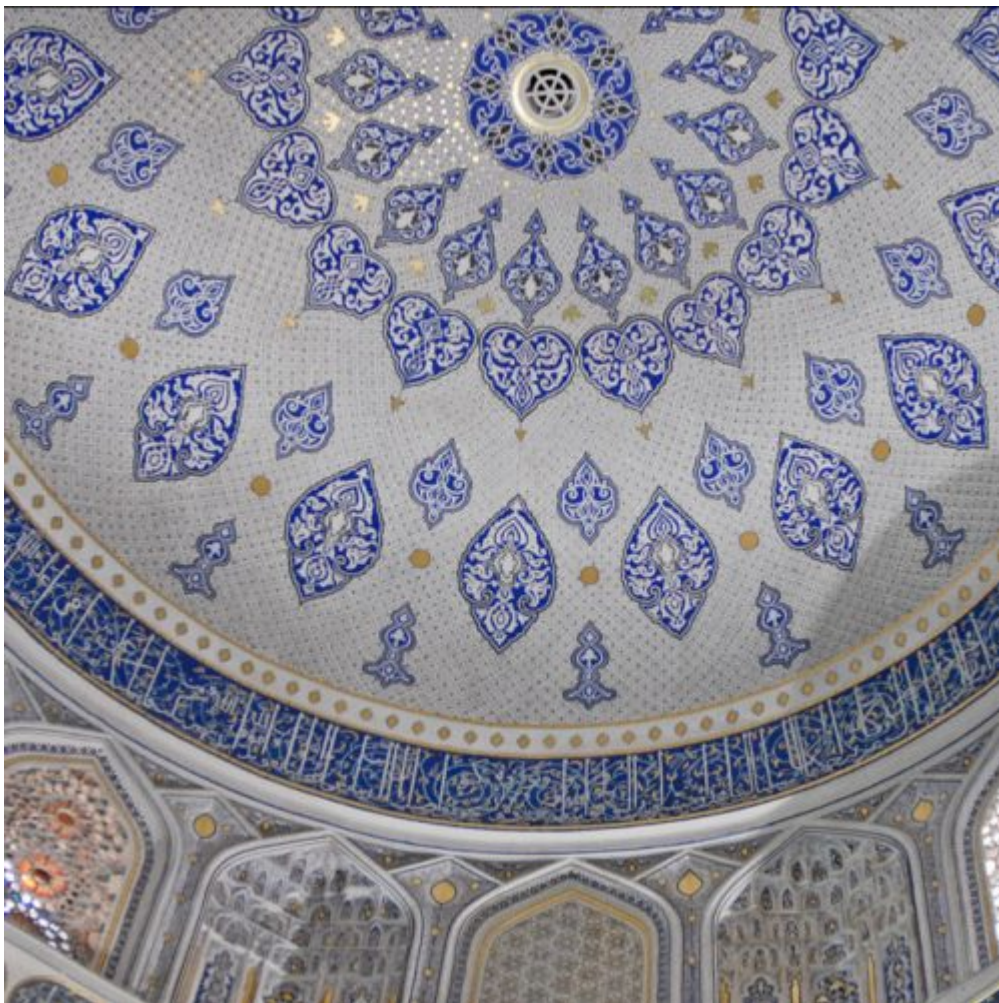[more]

Deadline for application: 15 December 2018

#Podcast Interview Round Up: The Best of October

Allegra
November, 2018

After a short break, we're back with another round up of the best new author interviews from our podcasting heroes [New Books in Anthropology](). This month

there are 6 discussions ranging from creationism to Islamic critical thinking, Lakota ontology to Rojava revolutionaries, and Israeli bureaucracy to violence in film.
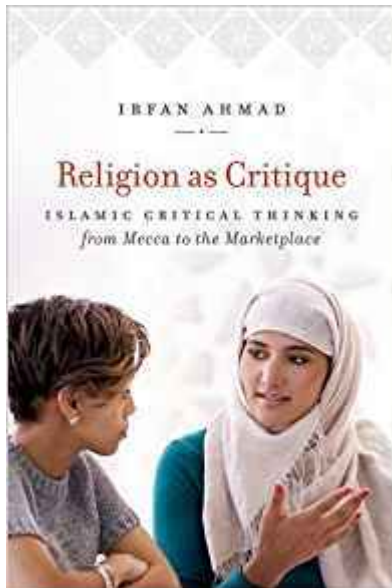
Religion as Critique: Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace
by Irfan Ahmad
(University of North Carolina Press 2017)
In the last few decades, questions relating to Islam's compatibility with liberal secular democracy, or the question of why Islam remains incompatible with Western liberal norms of thought and politics have generated considerable commentary in both scholarly and journalistic communities. Among the central assumptions driving such compatibility talk relates to Islam's allegedly inherent incapacity for critique, a virtue often heralded as a signature achievement and characteristic of liberal secularism. Irfan Ahmad's *Religion as Critique*: *Islamic Critical Thinking from Mecca to the Marketplace* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017) represents a devastating indictment of this dominant liberal assumption that Islam is inimical to critique. Turning this assumption on its head, Ahmad combines historical, textual, and ethnographic methods to argue that critique is and has always been central to Muslim intellectual thought and lived practice. The distinctive feature of this book is the way it fluctuates the camera of analysis between a genealogy of Western liberal discourses of critique as a way to puncture their universality and inevitability, while bringing into view alternate logics and imaginaries of critique in Muslim thought and practice, past and present. Eminently readable, this book will be widely discussed and debated in multiple fields, including Religious Studies and Islamic Studies.
Interview by SherAli Tareen
Listen **here**!

https://files.newbooksnetwork.com/islamicstudies/133islamicstudiesahmad.mp3
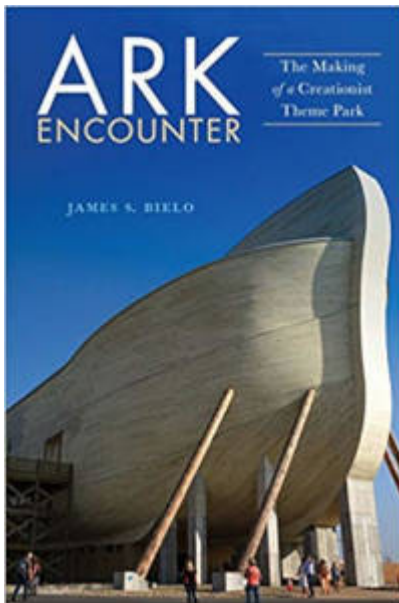
Ark Encounter: The Making of a Creationist Theme Park
by James S. Bielo
(New York University Press 2018)

In his new book, *Ark Encounter: The Making of a Creationist Theme Park* (NYU Press, 2018), James Bielo, Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Miami University, goes behind the scenes at Grant County, Kentucky's creationist theme park, which opened in July 2016. Entertainment has long been understood as important aspect of Christianity in the US, but the theme park, which includes a re-creation of Noah's ark, provides a striking setting through which to ask questions such as how creationists present their beliefs to the broader public. *Ark Encounter* is, in part, a workplace ethnography, which describes the entwined conceptual and aesthetic work through which the park's design team imagine how to most effectively and playfully communicate a controversial religious perspective.

Bielo's findings are situated in discussion with other groundbreaking anthropological work on how categories such as 'fundamentalist' have been constructed over time, perhaps most notably Susan Harding's scholarship. While the whole book is ethnographically rich and reflexive, an appendix describes in useful detail (for both readers and for those planning or currently engaged in their own research projects) the processes through which Bielo entered – and left – his fieldsite.

Interview by Siobhan Magee

Listen **here**!

https://files.newbooksnetwork.com/anthropology/023anthropologybielo.mp3

[Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture (Revised Edition)](#)

by Smadar Lavie

(University of Nebraska Press 2018)

In *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture* (Revised Edition) (University of Nebraska Press, 2018), Smadar Lavie analyzes the racial and gender justice protest movements in Israel. She suggests that Israeli bureaucracy is based on a theological notion that inserts the categories of religion, gender, and race into the foundation of citizenship. In this revised and updated edition Lavie connects intra-Jewish racial and gendered dynamics to the 2014 Gaza War, providing an extensive afterword that focuses on the developments in Mizraḥi feminist politics and culture between 2014 and 2016 and its relation to Palestinians.

Interview by Yacoov Yadgar

Listen **here**!

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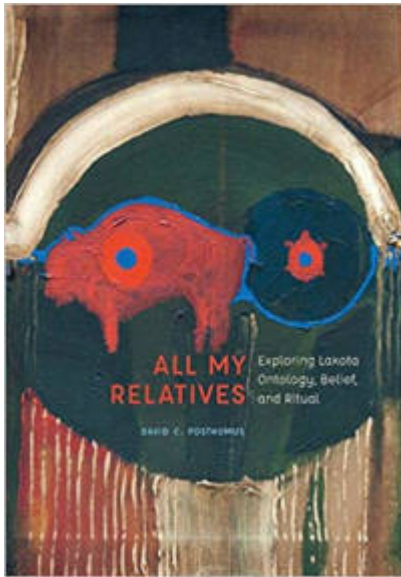
All My Relatives: Exploring Lakota Ontology, Belief, and Ritual

by David C. Posthumus

(University of Nebraska Press 2018)

In *All My Relatives: Exploring Lakota Ontology, Belief, and Ritual* (University of Nebraska Press, 2018), David C. Posthumus, Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Native American Studies at the University of South Dakota, offers the first revisionist history of the Lakotas' religion and culture in a generation. He applies key insights from what has been called the "ontological turn," particularly the dual notions of interiority/soul/spirit and physicality/body and an extended notion of personhood, as proposed by A. Irving Hallowell and Philippe Descola, which includes humans as well as nonhumans. *All My Relatives* demonstrates how a new animist framework can connect and articulate otherwise disparate and obscure elements of Lakota ethnography. Stripped of its problematic nineteenth-century social evolutionary elements and viewed as an ontological or spiritual alternative, this reevaluated concept of animism for a twenty-first-century sensibility provides a compelling lens through which traditional Lakota mythology, dreams and visions, and ceremony may be productively analyzed and more fully understood.

Posthumus explores how Lakota animist beliefs permeate the understanding of the real world in relation to such phenomena as the personhood of rocks, ghosts or spirits of deceased humans and animals, meteorological phenomena, familiar spirits or spirit helpers, and medicine bundles. *All My Relatives* offers new insights into traditional Lakota culture for a deeper and more enduring understanding of indigenous cosmology, ontology, and religion.

Interview by Ryan Tripp

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Violence's Fabled Experiment
by Richard Baxstrom and Todd Meyers
(August Verlag 2018)
Richard Baxstrom and Todd Meyers are anthropologists who have an interest in studying film for its value in a way to view the world. In *Violence's Fabled Experiment* (August Verlag, 2018), they examine three filmmakers: Werner Herzog, Joshua Oppenheimer, and Lucien Castaing-Taylor. Each artist is known for interesting, but controversial films that feature violence in different ways. In the book, Richard and Todd both critique and praise the importance of each and their methods and subjects.
Interview by Joel Tscherne
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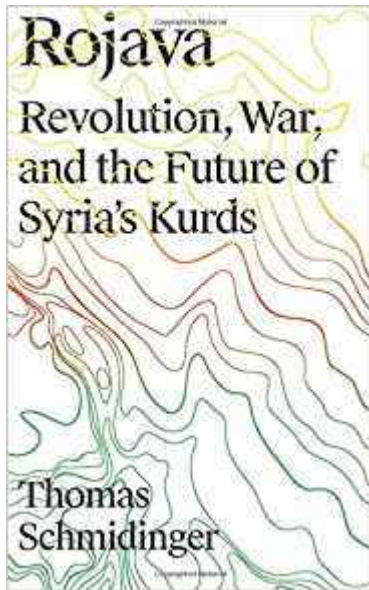
[Rojava: Revolution, War and the Future of Syria's Kurds](#)

by Thomas Schmidinger

(Pluto Press 2018)

Thomas Schmidinger's *Rojava: Revolution, War and the Future of Syria's Kurds* (Pluto Press, 2018) is an exploration of the history and present of Syrian Kurdistan. It is an excellent introduction to a fraught topic, one drawn from extensive, first-hand ethnographic research. It presents multiple perspectives from both major and minor political parties as well as the perspective of Kurds and other ethnic groups living within Syrian Kurdistan. Included is an accessible and useful history of the complicated party politics within the Kurds themselves as well as Kurdistan's relations with not just the Syrian government, but regional states also.

Interview by Jeff Bristol

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The Presence of Absence in

Surrogate Homes

Veronika Siegl
November, 2018

"Why does it matter if Raia is at home or not?", the clinic's flat-manager wondered. "It's not her apartment but the clinic's", she said with a forced smile, and it was strictly forbidden to take pictures of "their" surrogates anyway. As such, it was handy for her that Raia Dimitrovna had medical examinations and would be out on the day the manager had proposed for our photo session. She would be accompanying us, watching our every move, making sure the photographer and I only documented the apartments and the objects in them. And she would be answering all our questions in Raia's absence. Yes, including any about the surrogate's personal belongings.

There was an uneasy irony to this situation, for it was precisely the topic of absence that interested the photographer Sarah Hildebrand. Sarah had come to visit me during my fieldwork time at the Altra Vita IVF-Clinic in Moscow to take pictures for our book project *hope*. The book would narrate the stories of people who crossed emotional, corporeal and geographical boundaries in the hope of finding a better life. Sarah's photos sought to reflect the traces of these people, while they themselves should not appear on the pictures. It was the presence of an absence the photographer was intrigued by. But we did not want to enter Raia's flat without her being there. It would have felt like an act of violence, like an intrusion into her private space, despite the approval she had given me and despite the word of caution she had added to this approval:

We would not be able to capture any traces of her in the photographs, Raia had said. Her soul (dusha) was not here, not in this apartment.

Not even in Moscow.

Raia had moved to the capital after life in her hometown, Donetsk, had become too dangerous. The military conflict between Russia and Ukraine in early 2014 had led to several bombings of towns and cities in Eastern Ukraine. Raia had left her family, her flat, her job and her car, and had fled to Moscow to work in one of the many infertility clinics, to carry a child for an unknown couple. She would earn one million roubles for her service as a surrogate – an amount with which she could resettle in the south of Russia and build a secure existence for herself and her five-year-old daughter. She was hoping to buy a flat, so she could have a place "of her own", as she stressed; a new home, a home that reflected her traces, her soul. The apartment in Moscow was just a temporary home for nine months, for the time of her pregnancy, just as Raia's womb was a temporary home – or a "little house" (*domchik*), as some of the surrogates said – for the child she was carrying.

On the afternoon of the photo session, the manager offered us to visit Daria Borisova's rather than Raia's flat, as the former would be at home. When we

arrived Daria was in the middle of preparing the meat for her dinner. The manager told her to stay in the kitchen and nudged us into the room that functioned as living room and bedroom alike. I had been to this flat a couple of times before, to drink tea and chat with Daria. But being here with Sarah, and being attentive to the traces changed the way I perceived and experienced this space. While Sarah put up the tripod for her Hasselblad, my gaze wandered from the desk with the open laptop, over the remote control lying on one of the pulled-out sofa-beds, the shelf containing the hormonal medication Daria had to take, another shelf with various cosmetic items and an embroidered icon of a saint, to the curtain through which I could vaguely see the birch trees in the yard. The many textile and wallpaper patterns in the room made me feel dizzy.

The manager and Daria, who briefly joined us to inspect the unusual camera, were amused by our "boring" motives.

But for Sarah, as photographer, and for me, as anthropologist, it was precisely the unspectacular and the ordinary that attracted us, that had the potential to tell bigger stories.

One of the objects that caught our attention was a fan. Wrapped in transparent foil and tucked away behind an ironing board, the fan seemed to mirror the standardisation and anonymity of these clinic flats – flats that were all similarly arranged, whose furniture and equipment had little to do with their inhabitants. The few personal belongings that the surrogates brought to Moscow did not fill up the space. The walls were mostly empty but for the occasional painting or laminated sheet of flat instructions the manager must have put up. Raia was right, I thought. These flats were in a decent condition but they did not feel like a "home"; they had no soul. Sarah's photographs not only captured the traces that people left but also the difficulty of leaving traces in a place that was not meant to be home to these traces.

The wrapped fan can also be read as a symbol for the anonymity and standardisation of the surrogacy programmes themselves. Like Raia and Daria,

most surrogates I met during my fieldwork in Moscow did not know the couples whose children they were carrying. As infertility and surrogacy were highly stigmatised issues and belonged to the sphere of secrecy, many welcomed the opportunity to temporarily move from their towns to the big and anonymous city of Moscow to hide their growing bellies. "I have found work as a babysitter" or "as a maid": this is the story the women told their neighbours, friends and family, the story Daria had told her parents and her son, whom she had not seen in six months. She was also hoping to provide her family with a home of their own after the surrogacy; but she did not want anybody to know how she had earned this money.

Moscow's size and anonymity were also reasons why many surrogates disliked the city. While Raia was grateful for a temporary refuge, she also felt lonely most of the time. The fact that she had no friends in Moscow, that she worried about getting lost in the noisy and congested streets, and that she was afraid of sudden complications concerning the pregnancy bound her to the surroundings of the clinic and to the everyday dullness of pregnant waiting.

The flat was relief and confinement at the same time.

From the clinic's perspective, the flats provided an opportunity for increased control. They perceived the surrogate body as dangerous, for a poor pregnant woman was imagined to be unpredictable: not only was she full of hormones but she could also make use of her powerful position as child-bearer in order to bribe the clinic or the intended parents. A common way of preventing such potential abuse was to inhibit direct contact between the two parties, between the surrogates and the intended parents. This further promoted anonymous and standardised all-inclusive programmes that were mediated and overseen by surrogacy agencies and clinics. Their measures of control took many forms. Raia and Daria both had to expect surprise visits from the manager, who would check on cleanliness or fridge contents, among other things. The control visits decreased after surveillance cameras were installed in the entrance halls of all

flats. The clinic hoped to discipline the women's bodies by regulating their movements in and out of the flats. The women were not supposed to stay out late, not allowed to welcome men, and even female visitors – like me – sometimes aroused suspicion.

I could not help but notice the contradictory ways in which privacy was evaluated in the field of surrogacy.

On the one hand, many surrogates had to subject themselves to a form of control that severely intruded into their private sphere. On the other hand, I was often denied access to this field with the argument that it was unethical to do ethnographic research on such a delicate and hidden issue. Knowledge about surrogacy should be protected, not shared, and my scholarly interest was devalued as improper "nosiness" (*lyubopitstvo*). Lack of trust was a big issue for many of my research participants and it was this aspect I brought up in my conversation with Daria and the manager on the afternoon of the photo session. After realising that the photographer needed more time than expected, the two women had lost interest in controlling her moves. While Sarah was hovering around in the kitchen, they started questioning me about the differences between life in Russia and life in "Europe" (which, to them, clearly did not include Russia). Russian people had witnessed too much corruption and fraud to trust each other, the manager said. "Where you are from, people are quickly called 'friends'. But not here. Here, 'friends' are basically part of the family." Family was also what she found among her colleagues at work, she continued, after moving from Belorussia to Moscow. In her case, the clinic had succeeded in creating a place she could call home.

At the end of the day the manager seemed to have understood what Sarah and I were hoping to find in the surrogates' flats. When leaving Daria's flat after two hours, she offered us to stop by another apartment. A surrogate just moved out this very morning – "We might still be able to feel her presence despite her

absence."

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A shorter version of this article, titled "Meine Seele ist nicht hier", was published in German on [Anthroblog, Institut für Sozialanthropologie](#) (4/ 2018).

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[The photo and text book "hope"](#) was published with Christoph Merian (Basel, Switzerland) in March 2018. The three chapters of the publication explore surrogacy in Russia, liver transplantation in Germany as well as migration and death in the Spanish–Moroccan borderlands. The book resulted from the collaboration between photographer Sarah Hildebrand and the social anthropologists Gerhild Perl, Julia Rehsmann und Veronika Siegl.

Featured image by Sarah Hildebrand.

CALL FOR REVIEWS: NEW BOOKS ON THE EUROPEAN MIGRATION REGIME

Allegra
November, 2018
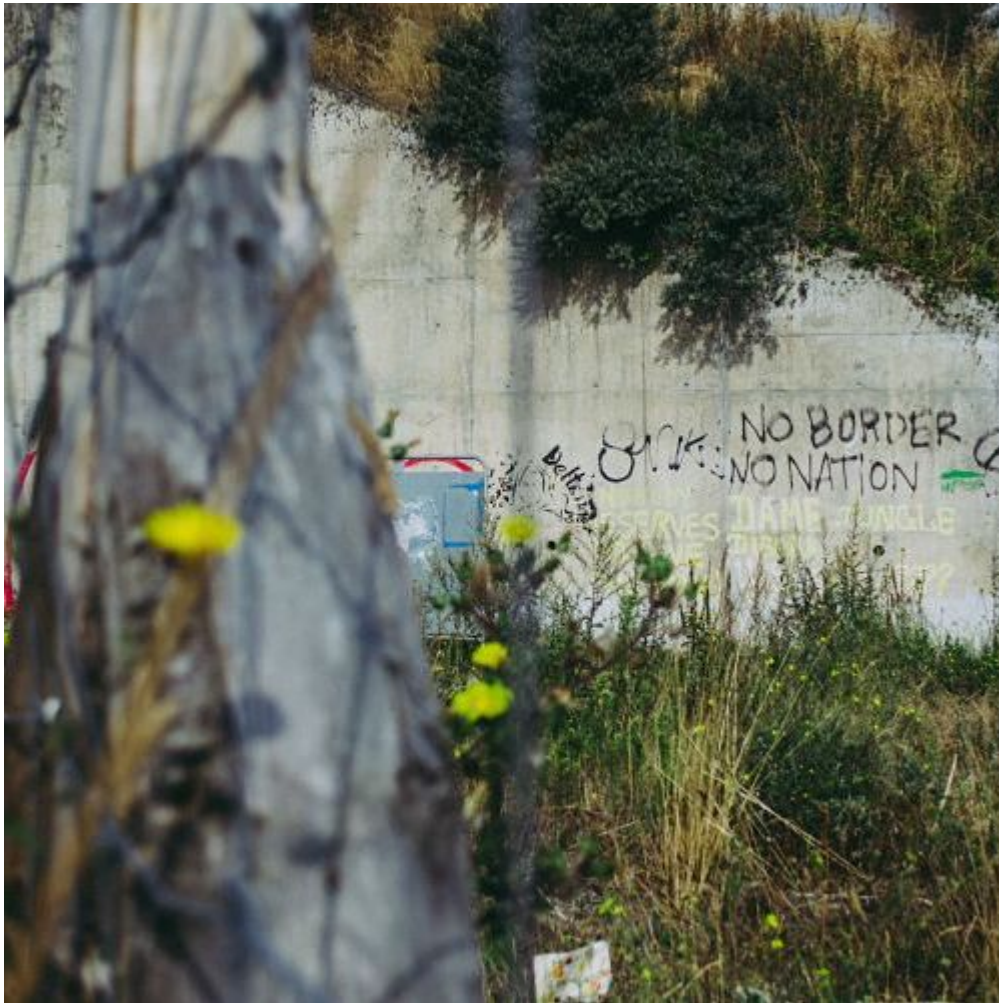
Three years after Europe declared a 'crisis' of migration control, its border and migration regimes have become increasingly repressive. A growing body of critical scholarship is attending to these dynamics and their effects, examining gaps between policy and practice, intended and unintended consequences, and the harms and suffering these migration regimes produce.

Our list of books traces how this European migration regime comes into being and the different ways in which it is practiced throughout its internal and external border landscapes and affects the lives of migrants.

The collection *The Borders of Europe: Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering,* edited by Nicholas De Genova, examines the declared 'crisis' of Europe's borders and the effect of militarized border enforcement on migrants

who try to exercise their freedom of movement. The collaborative ethnography *Migrants before the Law: Contested Migration Control in Europe* by Tobias Eule, Lisa Marie Borrelli, Annika Lindberg and Anna Wyss analyses Kafkaesque migration control practices in the Schengen area via an ethnography of the everyday contestations over migration law enforcement across eight states. Similarly, Anna Tuckett's *Rules, Paper, Status* explores how migrants' inclusion and exclusion is negotiated in the everyday workings of migration law inside Italy's migration bureaucracy. Katerina Rozakou's monograph *Out of "love" and "solidarity"* turns the lens towards the role of civil society in reproducing and contesting these boundaries by analyzing various forms of voluntary work with refugees in Greece. In *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System*, Victoria Canning traces how structural violence is enacted within the British asylum regime and its harmful effects, using an intersectional lens. These border regimes importantly extend beyond their geographical delineations: *Gender, Violence, Refugees* by Susanne Buckley-Zistel and Ulrike Krause, which explores gender dynamics in the context of displacement, brings additional, important perspectives from across the world, and *After Deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives,* edited by Shahram Khosravi examines what happens to migrants after deportation from Europe.

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Line Spacing: 1,5

No footnotes.

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

Do not forget to include your name, (academic) affiliation, a photograph of yourself and a short bio of 2-3 sentences.

De Genova, Nicholas (ed). 2017. *The Borders of "Europe". Duke University Press.*

In recent years the borders of Europe have been perceived as being besieged by a staggering refugee and migration crisis. The contributors to *The Borders of "Europe"* see this crisis less as an incursion into Europe by external conflicts than as the result of migrants exercising their freedom of movement. Addressing the new technologies and technical forms European states use to curb, control, and constrain what contributors to the volume call the autonomy of migration, this

book shows how the continent's amorphous borders present a premier site for the enactment and disputation of the very idea of Europe. They also outline how from Istanbul to London, Sweden to Mali, and Tunisia to Latvia, migrants are finding ways to subvert visa policies and asylum procedures while negotiating increasingly militarized and surveilled borders. Situating the migration crisis within a global frame and attending to migrant and refugee supporters as well as those who stoke nativist fears, this timely volume demonstrates how the enforcement of Europe's borders is an important element of the worldwide regulation of human mobility.
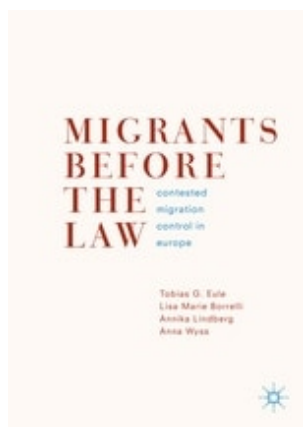

Eule, Tobias; Borrelli, Lisa Marie; Lindberg, Annika and Wyss, Anna. forthcoming. *Migrants before the Law. Contested Migration Control in Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book traces the practices of migration control and its contestation in the European migration regime in times of intense politicization. The collaboratively written work brings together the perspectives of state agents, NGOs, migrants with precarious legal status, and their support networks, collected through multi-sited fieldwork in eight European states: Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden and Switzerland. The book provides knowledge of how European migration law is implemented, used, and challenged by different actors, and of how it lends and constrains power over migrants' journeys and prospects.

An ethnography of law in action, the book contributes to socio-legal scholarship on migration control at the margins of the state.
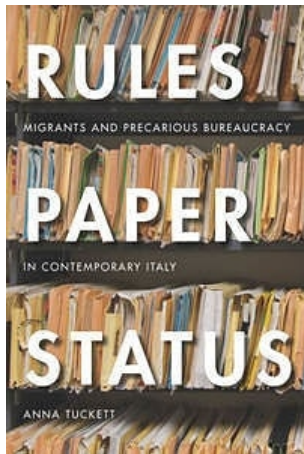
[Anna Tuckett. 2018. *Rules, Paper, Status: Migrants and Precarious Bureaucracy in Contemporary Italy.* Stanford University Press.](#)

Whether motivated by humanitarianism or concern over "porous" borders, dominant commentary on migration in Europe has consistently focused on clandestine border crossings. Much less, however, is known about the everyday workings of immigration law inside borders. Drawing on in-depth ethnographic fieldwork in Italy, one of Europe's biggest receiving countries, *Rules, Paper, Status* moves away from polarized depictions to reveal how migration processes actually play out on the ground. Anna Tuckett highlights the complex processes of inclusion and exclusion produced through encounters with immigration law.

The statuses of "legal" or "illegal," which media and political accounts use as synonyms for "good" and "bad," "worthy" and "unworthy," are not created by practices of border-crossing, but rather through legal and bureaucratic processes within borders devised by governing states. Taking migrants' interactions with immigration regimes as its starting point, this book sheds light on the productive nature of legal and bureaucratic encounters and the unintended consequences they produce. *Rules, Paper, Status* argues that successfully navigating Italian

immigration bureaucracy, which is situated in an immigration regime that is both exclusionary and flexible, requires and induces culturally specific modes of behavior. Exclusionary laws, however, can transform this social and cultural learning into the very thing that endangers migrants' right to live in the country.


Rozakou, Katerina. 2018. *Από «αγάπη» και «αλληλεγγύη»* [Out of "love" and "solidarity": Voluntary work with refugees in 21st century Greece], Alexandria. (Greek-speaking reviewer wanted)

This monograph examines the construction of the volunteer as a moral Greek and European citizen in early 21st century Greece. Narratives of volunteerism and civil society that emerged at that time echoed the modernisation and Europeanisation visions of Greek society. The volunteer emerged as the epitome of the modern citizen, a disinterested subject working voluntarily for the common good. Yet these projects remained fragmented and incomplete in Greece. A certain "lack of volunteerism" was broadly attributed to Greek exceptionalism. The book challenges this dominant hypothesis regarding the presumed underdevelopment of volunteerism and suggests an alternative analytical approach. It shows how the attempts to regularise and institutionalise volunteerism conflicted vernacular forms of public sociality. Based on fieldwork in two associations, the Hellenic Red Cross and Voluntary Work Athens, this ethnographic study explores two different versions of volunteerism, humanitarian

and militant volunteerism and their historical genealogies.

Out of "love" and "solidarity" focuses on voluntary work with refugees and on the political production of relationality. The book explores the relationships between refugees and residents of Greece who tried not only to help them, but also to incorporate them in culturally significant forms of social interaction. The monograph unearths "love" and "solidarity" as key formative concepts of public sociality. Drawing upon the anthropological discussion on the gift, this study explores the ways in which the relations between the volunteers and the refugees reproduce, contest and transform dominant modalities of dealing with the "other" such as hospitality.
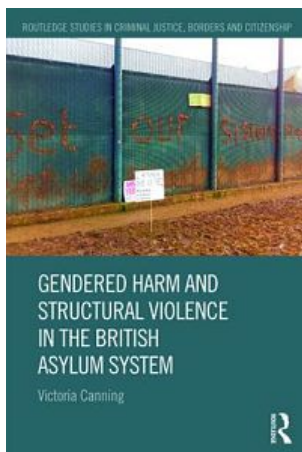
[Canning, Victoria. 2018. *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence in the British Asylum System*. London: Routledge.](#)

Britain is often heralded as a country in which the rights and welfare of survivors of conflict and persecution are well embedded, and where the standard of living conditions for those seeking asylum is relatively high. Drawing on a decade of activism and research in the North West of England, this book contends that, on the contrary, conditions are often structurally violent. For survivors of gendered violence, harm inflicted throughout the process of seeking asylum can be intersectional and compound the impacts of previous experiences of violent

continuums. The everyday threat of detention and deportation; poor housing and inadequate welfare access; and systemic cuts to domestic and sexual violence support all contribute to a temporal limbo which limits women's personal autonomy and access to basic human rights.

By reflecting on evidence from interviews, focus groups, activist participation and oral history, *Gendered Harm and Structural Violence* provides a unique insight into the everyday impacts of policy and practice that arguably result in the infliction of further gendered harms on survivors of violence and persecution.

Of interest to students and scholars of criminology, zemiology, sociology, human rights, migration policy, state violence and gender, this book develops on and adds to the expanding literatures around immigration, crimmigration and asylum.


[Buckley-Zistel, Susanne, and Ulrike Krause. 2017. *Gender,Violence, Refugees*. Berghahn Books.](#)

Providing nuanced accounts of how the social identities of men and women, the context of displacement and the experience or manifestation of violence interact, this collection offers conceptual analyses and in-depth case studies to illustrate how gender relations are affected by displacement, encampment and return. The essays show how these factors lead to various forms of direct, indirect and structural violence. This ranges from discussions of norms reflected in policy

documents and practise, the relationship between relief structures and living conditions in camps, to forced military recruitment and forced return, and covers countries in Africa, Asia and Europe.
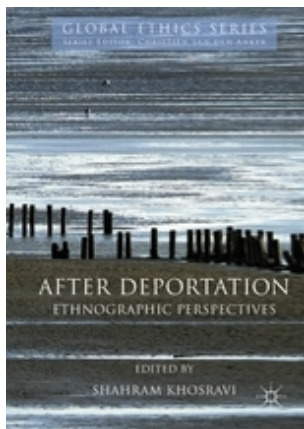
[Khosravi, Shahram. (ed). 2017. *After Deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.](#)

This book analyses post-deportation outcomes and focuses on what happens to migrants and failed asylum seekers after deportation. Although there is a growing literature on detention and deportation, academic research on post-deportation is scarce. The book produces knowledge about the consequences of forced removal for deportee's adjustment and "reintegration" in so-called "home" country. As the pattern of migration changes, new research approaches are needed. This book contributes to establish a more multifaceted picture of criminalization of migration and adds novel aspects and approaches, both theoretically and empirically, to the field of migration research.

Featured image by [Radek Homola](#) on [Unsplash](#)

The Erotics of History

Anthony Ballas
November, 2018

Donald Donham's *The Erotics of History: An Atlantic African Example* is not a traditional ethnography. The author first became aware of a provocative erotic practice through his white, gay neighbor in Oakland, California, whom Donham explains sold his house in order "to move to Africa and live with his married-to-a-woman boyfriend" that he met online (18). Donham visited this anonymous West African community multiple times in order to conduct fieldwork for one year on

the hybridized culture of the region, exploring the economic, social and sexual history of its particular erotic practices. Donham explains that his motivation for understanding this community arose not from "the deepening of ethnographic detail," but rather for "the construction of a theoretical approach that would make sense of such a provocative case" (26). *The Erotics of History*, therefore, is largely devoid of ethnographic details, instead seeking answers to a larger complex of questions concerning colonialism, slavery, technology, capitalism, and erotic identity (26).

This approach allows Donham to critique the universality of sexuality by focalizing one particular cultural erotic practice. Specifically, Donham analyses an erotic practice in which African men meet white, homosexual American and European men over the internet, and invite them to live in their community from anywhere from one month to a few years.

> *The white men typically act as benefactors for their African lovers, supporting them financially and purchasing gifts, homes, automobiles and alike for them during their stay. These relationships are grounded, argues Donham, in the historical fetishization of African men under the European colonial gaze, which tended (and still tends) to hypermasculinize African men.*

By zeroing in on this particular erotic practice, *The Erotics of History* problematizes the stability of human sexuality *en toto*, and in so doing posits a radically non-essentialist, and even anti-historicist interpretation of human erotic practice.

Commenting on how eroticism is shaped by the socio-economic conditions of colonialism and capitalism, *The Erotics of History* identifies how this particular male-male erotic practice came to be between European men and African men based on an "inversion of the actual historical pattern" of master/slave relations between the two continents. The hypermasculinized image of African men produced by colonial discourse and accompanied by a fantasy of reversing power relations "motivated by black revenge for past white oppression [...] created a particular erotic experience for both Europeans and Africans," writes Donham (7). For Donham, "the erotics of history" stands for "how particular erotic attachments of individuals are conditioned by wider historical and cultural patterns and memories" (7-8). By investigating the nuances of this particular erotic practice while keeping an ear to the ground of universality, Donham "situate[s] stories of sexual attraction — fetishes — within the wider contours and changes of postcolonial capitalism itself" (8). In essence, Donham seeks to prove "how the actual history of power can condition, through reversal and redefinition, the constitution of the erotic" (73).

Donham elaborates a provocative account of fetishization and the erotic, arguing that "the very process of erotization may necessarily involve some 'objectification'," or, as he will go on to claim, fetishes function as "external controlling organs" on the body of the subject (15, 38).

For Donham, the fetish is the fundamental, material ground of all erotics, a point which is elaborated on in terms of both history and the political

consequences thereof.

Chapters Two and Three offer a brief history of the concept of fetish from its African roots, through Hegel, Marx, Freud and Lacan, Foucault and up through Bruno Latour's notion of the 'factish.' As Donham observes, from the standpoint of European rationalism, "the notion of the sexual fetish originated precisely in structural opposition to the tamed interests, and in doing so, it became the very epitome of the irrational" (13). One example of this opposition can be found in Hegel's racism toward the African continent, posed as the idea of fetish as "what reason was *not*" (29), and therefore indicating the alleged rift between European reason and irrational African 'primitivism.' For Marx, explains Donham, the fetish transformed into the "misattribution of the power and creativity of human labor to mere things" (29). Although Freud's conception echoed Marx's insofar as "fetishism involved a displacement from 'reality,'" Donham contends that, "the primal story he [Freud] told involved not the shape of world history but the contours of individual development" (29).

For Donham's purposes in investigating the postmodern condition of the fetish, "fetishes can be cultivated as tastes can be 'educated.' They depend upon an infrastructure of mediation, social interaction, and historical context" (85). At their roots, fetishes are therefore enculturated, economized, and produced via social structures such as colonialism and capitalism.

From these theoretical coordinates, Donham tracks the ontology of the postmodern "contact zone" between cultures "with radically different definitions of the erotic, [and] roles to be taken in sex," tracking the "underground libidinal networks" that form between them (19). In the case of African men engaged in "… male-male relationships with foreigners," their relations began "to subsidize traditional marriage" between men and women, often in terms of financial support (25). Donham inverts the long-held notion that sexuality exists as a flexible set of cultural practices and object-choices, asserting on the contrary that "unstable, the erotic changes over time" (51).

Donham reads human sexuality as an obstacle rather than a solution, and is therefore more in line with the psychoanalytic tradition than the Foucaultian.

In fact, in a particularly striking passage — from Chapter Four "The Poverty of Sexuality," the title of which echoes Marx's "The Poverty of Philosophy" — Donham implicitly indicts Foucault, as he writes, "[t]he adjective, 'sexual,' continually modifies and therefore moves, but the noun, 'sexuality,' denotes a determinate state of being with distinct predicates" (48). This is therefore why Donham opts to study erotics rather than sexuality, critiquing followers of Foucault by writing, "it is altogether surprising to see his [Foucault's] supposed followers pluralizing 'sexuality' into 'sexualities' — as an assumed progressive, more inclusive theoretical move" (48-49). This observation parallels Žižek's psychoanalytic critique of the LGBTQ+ movement (or movements), on the "deadlock of classification" and the need for continuous pluralization and categorization of discrete sexualities (Žižek, 2016).

In Chapters Five and Six, Donham details the roles that both photography and the internet play in the contact zone between European and African men. Donham turns to Robert Mapplethorpe's *Man in Polyester Suit* (1980) as an example of the way in which black masculinity was fetishistically produced by the photographic image, observing that, "before the pervasiveness of photographic images, the imprinting of fetishes upon social actors depended upon unmediated seeing… Afterword, the camera not only conveyed fetishes but also may have played a role in propagating them" (56). Donham outlines how both photography and the internet as collective media are capable of housing large quantities of educational data as well as connecting distant cultures together, generating a veritable "encyclopedia of erotic reference" (97). Indeed, as Donham observes, "many of the relationships between Africans and foreigners… had begun in Internet cafés," mentioning how "one or two… were entirely devoted to young African men educating themselves about Western gay customs, all the way from the difference between tops and bottoms to sadomasochism and master/slave relationships" (22).

Not only does he provide successful critiques of colonialism and capitalism, but as well Donham demonstrates the intimate albeit fraught relationship between political economy, geography and erotics, tracing an ontology of the concept of fetish and the link between fetish-objects and eroticism in contemporary social relations between African and European men.

> *The Erotics of History is for anthropology what Alenka Zupančič's What IS Sex? is for psychoanalysis; both successfully dismantle longstanding colloquial notions of sexuality and longstanding historicist/deconstructive theories of sexuality as well.*

The correspondence between these two authors is palpable, as toward the end of the book, Donham asks a question that Zupančič herself seeks to unpack, namely "what makes sex sexy?" (84). For Zupančič, sexuality is an ontological category, and therefore "sexuality gets sexualized precisely in [the] interval that separates it from itself" (Zupančič , 2012). The ontological is as well at stake in Donham's work, particularly in his take on the fetish, as he goes on to observe how all of the permutations of the concept of the fetish "problematize, in different ways, the assumed boundaries of persons and things, or persons and parts of persons treated like things," ostensibly rethinking the boundaries of the human subject, problematizing sexuality as a fixed, universal of human life by identifying how the erotic is entangled in the socio-economics conditions of human life, and therefore the book functions as an extended rumination on object-relations as such (85).

As Donham puts it in the book's preface, although he has spent his career "extolling the virtues of ethnography," the present volume requires him necessarily to leave the ethnographic form behind; due to the persistence of homophobia in the Western coast of Africa, Donham's subjects would face great danger if their identities or even regional specificities were to be made manifest (xiii).

> *The anonymity of the community Donham analyses ostensibly makes his study an ethnography sans ethnos, and in this way, a truly provocative account of*

sexuality, history, colonialism and capitalism, marking a unique achievement in postmodern anthropological studies. For these reasons, Donham's book is recommended for readers interested in investigating the intersections of anthropology, psychoanalysis and philosophy, as well as those interested in the burgeoning field of object-oriented or speculative realist thinking.

The work as well can be read as a 'meta'/'para'- ethnography, which not only provides a crucial commentary on the ethnographic form itself, but also demonstrates the utility of postmodern anthropological studies toward understanding how the particular is situated within the universal, and furthermore how the universal is always mediated by the particular in a perpetual dialectical engagement. For these reasons, Donham's book reaches well beyond the subject line that graces its back cover; although the work is most certainly an important contribution to anthropology, *The Erotics of History*, just as erotics themselves, offers an excess which cannot easily be contained by one designation alone, and therefore informs theoretical practice from a multitude of disciplinary fronts at once. An open access version of *The Erotics of History* is available for download from www.luminosoa.org.

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EASA 2018 – The Other Protocols [2] and a Response

Nila Jeep
November, 2018

Plenary B "Migrants, Refugees and Public Anthropology", Andre Gingrich, Marie-Claire Foblets, Ruben Andersson, 16 August 2018

Notes on Migration Policies by Nila Jeep

In the front

they are sitting the three

talking about border security

in blossoming clothes

about Europe and the policies

big failures

of commissions and committees

deportations

frictions

and fractions

of human lives.

All the political lies

the systemical issues of the system

the far right

the unlikable other

the left

the maybe likeable other

positioning and re-positioning and de-positioning

telling their bubble

mumbling

A Response, by Ruben Andersson

'No possible answers' sums up many of the problems haunting our tortuous migration politics, and it is a thought – it is fair to assume – that is not far from the mind of many of us working on migration and borders today.

At EASA, I tried to set out some of the frustrations scholars encounter as we alternately avoid, interact and clash with the policy world and its rather futile quest for swift 'solutions'. In particular, irregular migration seems an intractable policy problem: no matter how tall fences we build, how many high-level conferences we convene, how much money we throw at the borders, it keeps coming back, stirring populist anger and fear.

Just as frustratingly, whatever scholars and critics say, the security apparatus keeps 'stumbling' from one crisis to the next, rehashing its old methods for keeping Others out. Meanwhile, decision-makers keep trying to hide the consequences of border security away from sight, amid depressed and desperate families locked into detention, in the deadly Sahara desert, or in camps set on the wrong sides of the global divides.

But this deterrence is in itself is a terrible 'answer' to the question of 'what to do with migration' – a question, moreover, that politicians themselves keep framing for their own short-term electoral ends. In the echo-chamber of migration politics, deterrence 'works' (for a while). Pushing risks, costs and suffering away from view lets politicians off the hook, while the perennial sense of 'crisis at the borders' keeps the deterrence cash flowing, the media entertained, and citizens alternately anxious and reassured.

In this line of policy, failure is the new success, we may say: and the fence can always stand taller.

Is there a way out? The answer is not to be found in the mumblings and stumblings of 'commissions and committees', where old wine is yet again being poured into new bottles (with proposals for refugee processing centres outside Europe; more crackdowns in Africa; sharper distinctions between 'illegal migrants' and refugees; and the like). There must be another way. We may start, for one, by revealing the systemic issues Nila weaves into her poem, to see how the current 'answer' falls short. We can do that, for instance, by comparing the 'fight against migration' with the long-running and deadly 'war on drugs', applying lessons learned from the latter as we seek to unmask the similarly brutal (and often futile) quest to 'halt' or 'combat' human movement.

But we must also put effort into reframing the question – and the 'problem' – itself.

Sadly, for the time being, too few voices dare take such a step at a time when borders are closing in and nationalism is on the march. But this time, too, shall pass. The game of 'positioning' may not be moving much for now, but a fundamental repositioning may still come. As in the struggle over other global issues, from climate change to drug politics, such a move requires a broad coalition to start pushing away from the current political frame – and so helping, perhaps, to put an end to the political game of mumbling and stumbling to the next 'crisis', and to the next election.

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EASA 2018 – The Other Protocols

Nila Jeep
November, 2018

The following words, as well as two other poems to be published on Allegra in the near future were written during three plenaries at the 15th EASA Biennal Conference "Staying – Moving – Settling" which took place at Stockholm University from 14 to 17 August 2018. They are momentary reactions to the content of the lectures and reactions to the moods that floated in the room. Written during the talks, the poems intermingle the words spoken by the panel speakers with the words they triggered in me. I call these poems "The Other Protocols" because they differ from mere notes of the occurred and said. They are

utterly subjective and incomplete. They do not describe or report the whole content of a lecture but the feeling of it, trying to grasp the essence of an ephemeral moment.

Opening Keynote Lecture "Walling, Unsettling, Stealing" by Shahram Khosravi, 14 August 2018

Condensed Notes by Nila Jeep; pictures and captions by Shahram Khosravi

Barbed wire
the devils rope
the border walls stick like gum in your head
materializing exclusion in powerful symbolic ways.

Borders won't stop people but delay them
racializing time.
Waiting…
as power
forced
reminding
the others
the outers
their place in racialized world
of coding
the different passenger.

Keeping people in circulation is a way of depriving them from the future

of not-becoming
not letting them arrive
not letting them become
unpaid pensions
unpaid working hours
surplus value created:
How much time has been stolen?
How many hours?
How many lives?
Who is stuck in the waiting rooms of history
in the circulation of lines and travels
non-linear?

Who is caught
in times
and country lines?

The passenger
always passenger...