How Can Making Movies Do Sheep Any Good?

Clara Kleininger
April, 2017

John Adair and Sol Worth, American anthropologists and filmmakers, found themselves in the sticky situation of answering the above question in 1966. They had just presented the leading elder of a Navajo community, Sam Yazzie, with the idea of teaching several Native Americans from his community filmmaking.

'Will making movies do the sheep good?'

Worth was forced to reply that as far as he knew, making movies wouldn't do the sheep any good.

Sam thought this over, then, looking around at us he said,

'Then why make movies?'

Adair and Worth were intending to teach their students some basic filmmaking skills so they could find out how another culture might conceptualize the grammar of filmmaking differently, thereby researching culture-bound ways of representation. The project continued, but Sam's concern remained unanswered. However, it revealed some important issues that visual anthropologists as well as documentary filmmakers should reflect upon with every film they make: What and who do we make films for?

Ethnographic filmmakers straddle two worlds. On the one hand, they become filmmakers dedicated to building a narrative that reaches an audience and reflects how they see the world. On the other, they are anthropologists who approach modes of representation as well as issues of control over production and distribution of films with a cautious eye.

Visionary filmmaker Jean Rouch, linked to both anthropology and the more glamorous New Wave of French Cinema, declared that he made films firstly for himself. Secondly, he considered his primary audience the protagonists of his films. To him film was primarily a way of communication between himself and his subjects. How to approach the pitfalls of representation is a matter for debate: some argue that observational cinema is the way, while others look towards montage as the next step in anthropological filmmaking. Yet, there is another radical way. Again, Jean Rouch foresaw that with the new technological developments, 'the anthropologist will no longer monopolize the observation of things'. So in visual anthropology, what if we let go of our pride in being 'the author' and start collaborating?

With this in mind, *Nosso Morro* came into existence. The collaborative project in which we, six young visual anthropologists from The Big Tree Collective, tried to teach some filmmaking to a group of teenagers from Rio de Janeiro and shoot a collaborative film in the span of a few months. Our quite ambitious project included collaboration between participants of different ages, cultural backgrounds and economic status, as we were planning to bring together teenagers from the Rocinha favela of Rio de Janeiro with youths from the wealthy neighborhood of Gávea. The idea was to explore the differences and common experiences of teenagers who inhabit the same geographical space (the same street) but very different social spaces.

To describe some of our experiences to you—and to give you a better idea of collaboration in research and creation—two of us, Clara Kleininger and Daniel Lema, are co-writing this article. As an experiment we decided to compare fragments of field notes and later recollections regarding the most important moments of creating the workshop and the ethnographic film *Nosso Morro*.

Clara:

Almost a year ago, my colleague proposed a visual anthropology project in Rio de Janeiro. The idea stemmed from her personal experience: she grew up in Rio and went to school on Gávea street, the same place she wanted to explore through the *Nosso Morro* project. To me these were already good preconditions to start a promising project. Although we discussed some preliminary ideas, we did not decide upon a certain narrative for the film. We wanted to include the teenagers into the process of creating a film narrative.

Daniel:

In November 2015, I arrived to Rio de Janeiro as a member of the visual collective The Big Tree. Almost everything in the project had been discussed and researched: we had found a hosting institution where the workshop would take place, local partners, potential collaborators, teenagers from local communities willing to participate, etc. In short, the goals seemed to be clear and we had a sort

of production plan.

Gávea Street, in Rocinha (left) and Gávea (right side). Picture by
BTC (bigtreecollective.com)

Clara:

Initially we planned to split the workshop in between the [EARJ (American School of Rio de Janeiro)](#) in Gávea, an expensive gated school, and one of the schools in Rocinha. In the end it turned out impossible to find a higher education institution in Rocinha, as the teenagers from Rocinha go to several public schools, none of which are in the favela. In my opinion this limitation was a big loss to the project, as it brought a certain imbalance into the dynamic of the workshop.

Daniel:

The first contact revealed both the willingness of the ten teenagers to meet each other and collaborate, as well as a variety of social performances depending on their social background. Young people from Rocinha appeared specially dressed up for the occasion of our first meeting on a Saturday, in contrast with the more informal clothing chosen by the students from Gávea. Indeed, not only outfits of

Rocinha teenagers seemed to express a kind of courtesy or deference towards the institution they were entering, but also the attitude they showed, which was especially shy. Entering the [EARJ](#) school for the first time as an outsider (coming from Rocinha or from Europe) can be a quite intimidating experience. The high walls of the EARJ are crowned with barbed wire and CCTV monitors, the armed security staff at the checkpoint, or the bulletproof glass of the classrooms from which you see Rocinha on the opposite slope are part of the safety measures built for the intimidation of outsiders. Thus, while teenagers from Gávea had only to overcome the strangeness of the other, Rocinha teenagers had to overcome both the strangeness of the new people and a place which revealed its own performative apparatus.

Rocinha, viewed from the EARJ. Picture by BTC (bigtreecollective.com)

Clara:

Our first problem was defining the main focus of our project. Was it teaching ethnographic filmmaking—and teaching it well—so that the teenagers would later be able to use these skills? Or was the workshop just an introduction to finding the best approach to collaborate on a film and have a concrete, presentable

outcome that may be used for screenings in and outside of the community?

Daniel:

Despite the enthusiasm of the participants there were problems scheduling the weekly meetings, due to difficulties in reconciling the project with the everyday lives of the participants, part time jobs among Rocinha teenagers, homework and extracurricular activities for Gávea youngsters. Once the agendas were coordinated we started the development of the workshop. The learning objectives of it were bidirectional. First, the participants would get some basic theoretical lessons in audiovisual language, as well as hands-on knowledge on camera and sound recording skills. Second, the participants would enrich their understanding of each other and their distant yet geographically close communities. And third, we expected to be able to gain some insights regarding their communities through which we could develop a story for our documentary.

Clara:

In the end, after a short period of teaching, we focused on making a film, leaving the scriptwriting to the participants (guided by our questions), in an attempt to be as open and exploratory as possible. Our participants were used to school dynamics, so us asking what is important to them was often understood as a test of whether or not they could best guess what we want to hear. But this was also an encouraging sign of their motivation towards the project. They came to the meetings and worked hard and seriously. Each of them vouched for the project, convincing people around them, who were involved in community activities or had valuable experiences, that the project was worthwhile and they should be a part of the film. Due to our reluctance to guide the narrative and to the usual difficulties of planning documentary filmmaking, after the filming period we ended up with a eclectic collection of characters and situations. Although these all revolved around Gávea street, and in spite of an effort to press them all into one narrative, it seemed impossible to put the puzzle together.

Brainstorming with Nosso Morro participants. Picture by BTC (bigtreecollective.com)

'WHO DO WE MAKE FILMS FOR?'

Clara:

The main topic of the film remained, as we had planned it, working out the divisions as well as the meeting points of Rocinha and Gávea. Although the teenagers worked hard on finding common spaces, like the football game between the teams of Rocinha and the American School, or the prestigious ballet school that gives stipends to good dancers from Rocinha, interactions between the two social worlds were, as could be expected, few. But what our participants tried to constantly show us, was that these interactions, which have been growing during the past years, can begin to be respectful, even though they are still steeped in prejudices and unfair power balances.

A girl from Rocinha doing ballet in Gávea. Picture by BTC (bigtreecollective.com)

Amendoim – Community leader in Rocinha interviewed in Nosso Morro. Picture by BTC (bigtreecollective.com)

At first we intended the participants of the workshop to edit the film themselves,

but due to both time and equipment restrictions, our collective edited the rushes with regular feedback screenings to the participants and a lot of negotiations among each other.

We tried to follow the script that the participants had built and edited a first version. It soon turned out that the most valuable part of the project went missing through this. We reconsidered everything and decided to include the process of creation that took place during the workshop, which we had documented all along, into the final edit. In this way we built a film that gives insight into the relationships between the participants of this collaboration but also, more generally, into the specific dynamics that audio-visual media can trigger during research.

Daniel:

In trying to represent the dreams and opportunities of the communities of Rocinha and Gávea, we realized that the filmed workshop had to represent a 'common place' in the film: a familiar site to which the viewer could come back in order to follow the negotiation for the creation of the story, as it was in the actual experience. Like this, the final film would not merely be a product of the workshop, but rather a process created through the workshop. Therefore, by

using the workshop as the narrative thread we were able not only to tailor some kind of narrative and make it progress, but also we were capable of adding a new dimension of meaning to the film: that of self-reflexion. In other words, the visibility of the stitches became apparent. These reveal the participatory/collaborative methods employed and work as far more than mere cutaways, transforming the creators—us and the teenagers—into subjects of our own creation, thus providing a new reflexive framework upon which the lived experience and the created filmic experience could meet.

First street filming with the participants of Nosso Morro. Picture by BTC (bigtreecollective.com)

A last thought to conclude. MacDougall (1998:11) contends that film is less a communicative act than a form of commensal engagement that implicates subject, filmmaker and spectator alike.

In this light we see our collaboration as worthwhile. Not only for leaving those who participated with concrete knowledge and experience in a field that interested them. And also not just for bringing unlikely companions together and making a small step–even if just on a micro-scale–towards dialogue between the two neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro. But also for what resulted, a film that does not quite fit into the Western notion of narrative progression, but breaks perspective and representation into many smaller, disjointed points of view. We had to confront ourselves with our own expectations of what 'a film' should be and discard them, trying to build something new together.

Proceeding this way in the future, we might learn about a whole deal of new perspectives, not just hidden information, but things as innovative as looking beyond the Western 'blind spots', as the division between fiction and documentary or the conflict structure Western narratives tend to base upon.

It is between the three actors MacDougall mentions –viewer, subject and maker-that we, as researchers and anthropologists, have to engage with the other two ones in more challenging and experimental ways than that offered by conventional paradigms and narratives.

Nosso Morro (2016)

37 minutes

Director: Benjamin Llorens Rocamora, Clara Kleininger, Daniel Lema, Paloma Yáñez Serrano, Stefania Villa and Spyros Gerousis

Produced by [The Big Tree Collective](#)

Official Selection: Ethnographic Film Festival of Quebec

Conferences: Visual Participatory Methods (Paris), MMU PRG conference (Manchester), Göttingen conference.

Facebook: [@nossomorroproject](#)

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Filming Future Imaginaries in Kurdistan

Lana Askari
April, 2017

It was during my fieldwork in Slemani, Iraqi Kurdistan, when I started seeing Kobane popping up everywhere in the city. Hair salons, murals, restaurants, travel agencies and even newborn babies were being named after the small city in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan). Famous for its liberation from ISIS (DAESH), for which Kurdish forces had fought for months back in 2015, Kobane had become elevated into a new symbol of hope and resistance. What resonated even more with me was when a new bridge, connecting the northern ring road in Slemani, was

named "Kobane Bridge". At the time I was shooting a film about Mihemed, a Kurdish Syrian journalist from Kobane himself, who was living as a refugee in Iraqi Kurdistan. All at once my research had come together; future imaginaries, infrastructure and state building, Kurdish independence and migration — but how to connect them in film? In this contribution, I aim to engage with how visual methods can help develop ethnographic skills and advance how we 'understand our past, how we engage with our present and how we imagine our future.' (Pink 2009: 3). How do people envisage their future and how can they find agency to enact or plan for these horizons under precarious conditions and ever shifting contexts?

Can visual research methods offer a way to capture the invisibility of temporality and future imaginations?

This paper will consider the visual and theoretical approaches to exploring how people in Iraqi Kurdistan re-negotiate their future plans in times of crisis through discussing the ethnographic documentary film [*Bridge to Kobane*](#).

"Sometimes I wake up and think it was all a dream, I wish it was. You cannot make a plan because new things keep happening. I have to wait, maybe go to Europe or Australia. No one, even DAESH (ISIS), America and those forces here do not know what will happen."

Mihemed was stirring into a small pot with coffee in the kitchen of the NGO office he was working. As the froth was accumulating on the surface, he started moving the pot up and down until he was satisfied and poured the coffee into two cups. I had met Mihemed while I was following the work of a French NGO in charge of the food distribution in the refugee camps around Slemani. After some initial conversations about his work, Mihemed showed interest in working on a film project together. We decided on several scenes and locations for interviews, and I continued to visit him and his family during my fieldwork period.

Mihemed and his family fled from Syria a few years ago, after they had moved

from Sham (Damascus), to Haleb (Aleppo) and back to Kobane, until they fled across the border into Iraqi Kurdistan when the fight against ISIS intensified. In Iraqi Kurdistan he first worked as a journalist. However, when the economic crisis hit in 2015 and governmental cuts started affecting the economy at large, he started working for an NGO in order to support his children and parents, who were also in Slemani. Still active in his network, he continued to report on the situation in Syrian Kurdistan and attended conferences and meetings with fellow journalists. In 2016, Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) declared their autonomy from Syria, which was welcomed in solidarity by locals and Syrian Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan. Although the political ties between the different political parties across the two regions fluctuate in a struggle for power, the name of Kobane resonated deep across the Kurdish population.

Bridge to Kobane tells the story of Mihemed, who, despite the liberation, cannot return to Kobane due to the on-going war in Syria.

Connecting the Kobane bridge in Slemani to Mihemed's longing for a return to his hometown, the documentary film explores themes of mobility, death and ever shifting future horizons in connection to cross-border perceptions of the Kurdish nation. Here, Kobane as the critical event (Das, 1995) or 'generative moment' (Meinert and Kapferer, 2015) is linked to the Kurdish political imaginary and re-negotiated through home-making practices, creating interplay between time and future horizons through the use of montage.

The contribution of visual media in anthropology and ethnographic films has been acknowledged to be ethnographically descriptive and committed to participant observation (Taylor 1998: 537; Cox and Wright 2012: 11), the camera argued as an extension of the ethnographic gaze (Crawford and Turton 1992: 18). Film as ethnography has since thought to open space for issues of representation by involving them in the filming and editing decision making process (MacDougall 1998; Pink 2001). The importance of the visual lies in the capacity of images to make a direct appeal to the senses through its assemblage, manifested through

the illusion of presence rather than its direct illustration (MacDougall 2006; Cox and Wright 2012: 118). This relational and sensorial aspect is however not only created through the observational approach that the camera can capture. The strength of visual anthropology lies into the combination of the visual and text. Rather than conforming to a text/image divide put forward by anthropologists (Banks and Morphy 1997), Cox and Wright argue that visual anthropology can offer new ways of knowing and representing in social research through the convergence of the two (2012: 126).

In the observational style in ethnographic films, semi-structured interviews are placed in the process of daily activities and rituals, the embodied practice undertaken through a handheld camera allow for different engagements between the ethnographer and the informant (Henley 2006; MacDougall 2006). Considering then the reflexive moment about the ethnographic task (Clifford and Marcus 1986) not as merely textual, it also gave way to the spread of more phenomenological approaches (Jackson 1989), sensuous scholarship (Stoller 2010), sensory approaches (Taussig 1993; MacDougall 2006) and corporal engagements (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009). Thus observational cinema can be seen "a point of departure into anthropological inquiry" rather than an end (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009: 138). Informed by the observational method, I set out to film Mihemed in his daily routine, the presence of the camera evoking reflections on his current situation as a refugee. Mihemed and I decided on the places we thought necessary to include. Over the course of the next 9 months we continued to capture some moments of Mihemed's life in these spaces.

Film arguably opens an active space for reflection through which we obtain an insight into the subject's world, where we can begin to relate to aspects of their experience and imagine further implications (Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2009: 121; Henley, 2004: 114). Visual research and filmic ethnographies then inform us about drawing relations between themes and narratives, rather than generalisation. This makes it possible for the researcher to open an active space by allowing viewers to draw their own connections and inform about particular ways of social knowledge perhaps not easily communicated through written word

(MacDougall, 2006). My research focused on imaginaries of the future and how the shifting horizons of the yet-to-be were re-negotiated by people in Slemani. In Mihemed's case, migration became an important issue, not unknown to Kurds who have been subjected to multiple and multifaceted ways of migration across the 4 nation-states of existence (Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey).

How to show these changing plans of and for the future ethnographically through film?

Film editing is believed not to impose ideas from the outside, but to discern resonances within the rushes (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2009: 118). Thus, editing and montage becomes another tool within using visual methods and the output format. In 'Transcultural Montage' Suhr and Willerslev argue for montage as an amplifier of invisibility (2013). By using montage to present a certain absence or invisibility through disrupting the normative space of film, we see through its absence something that cannot be understood otherwise (Ibid: 6). They put forward that montage as an analytic offers not only the link between the experienced and the imaginary, what Irving has called the ability to capture the fractured and fracturing nature of human sense perception (2013: 105), but also works, as ritual, to show the multiple perspectives and interpretation that are continuously shaping our consciousness and experience (Suhr and Willerslev 2013: 11).

Film has been discussed as a powerful tool in dealing with capturing invisibilities, dream, futures, past and continuous changing in self-perception and self-becoming (MacDougall 1998; 2006; Kristeva in MacDougall 1998: 274). Irving proposes that montage in film works to inform the research not only as a method of filming on site, but also as an output that can allude to how people experience wholeness through different senses; it creates a reality as an experience that is not fragmented but manifests itself as coherent (2010, 2013). It is then here where transformative moments, such as imaginative horizons (Crapanzano 2004), can be explored through film as its fragmentary and transitory nature and how

different realities shaped through different senses and experiences can destabilize and juxtapose conflicting realities (Irving 2013). Montage then opens new possibilities for open-endedness; allowing audiences to be able to engage with the different connections and juxtapositions in the visual narrative.

The visual methodology thus allows engaging with how different life paths are imagined and reflected upon by informants.

I understand observational cinema and montage as a method of incorporating different embodied strategies and tools in order to collect ethnographic data. For example, a scene where the call to prayer evoked childhood memories to Mihemed is juxtaposed with the next scene, where these memories intertwine with his wishes for return or new migration, a future unattainable through border restraints. With the borders to Europe closed, the Turkey deal in place and his visa to Australia on hold, Mihemed has to opt for new ways of offering his family a better life. Over summer he helped his brother and sister-in-law to cross from Kobane over to Slemani, for the reason that their house in Kobane continued to be in ruins, the scarcity of work and food, and the unbearable wait for a never-ending war.

Cutting between Mihemed's narrations about what he considers Kurdistan, which shifts between only comprising Iraqi Kurdistan and at other times the wider Kurdistan region, with the communal narratives brought forward in a scene capturing a political rally, we can begin to relate different perspectives and imaginaries on what constitutes Kurdistan and the Kurdish nation.

The reflection of different life paths and futures becomes vividly visible in the final scene where Mihemed and his family go to visit the grave of his mother who passed away suddenly. "Kurdistan became her graveyard" Mihemed says. The realisation that his mother, despite escaping the cruelties of ISIS, found her final resting point in Iraqi Kurdistan links back to the slowly shaping and cutting off of different imagined life paths. Perhaps one of renegotiating to settle in Iraqi

Kurdistan through home-making and ritual, exemplified in the scene where the same concrete breezeblocks are used to build a new house, but also to make a grave. Using the camera as a catalyser in this scene, Mihemed slowly reveals his reflections on the sudden death of his mother. Through cutting these narrations with the pouring of water over the grave, part ritual and part play with his children, the audience can envision both the paths closing and opening in Mihemed life as the film ends.

Through a discussion of the visual methods used in Bridge to Kobane I aim to show that through montage and long-term observational film, we can open up a space to explore shifting future horizons and possible futures, leading to an understanding of how people renegotiate plans during times of crisis.

"We don't know what will come in the future… we have to drink a Syrian coffee to look and tell the future from the coffee grounds"

Back in time in the NGO kitchen Mihemed's smile showed traces of happier times, as he made sure that both cups contained the same amount of froth. "It is where the luck is".

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Photographic engagement

Camilo Leon-Quijano
April, 2017

In 2014 I started exploring people's lives in Parisian suburbs (*banlieue*)[1] through engaged and creative visual practices. Being an independent photographer, I wanted to see how people's experiences may be depicted through a variety of photographic practices. For me, discovering the way people interact in the city demanded a wider, engaged and creative way of thinking the urban experience than just making a 'classic' ethnography.[2] After all, following the same old and structured process of 'ethnographic data extraction' would only reproduce the same images and stereotypes I already had about the *banlieue*.[3]

I started exploring people's lives with my camera in Sarcelles, the biggest 'social housing city' of France.[4]

Photography was a useful instrument to depict through creative and reflexive activities the urban experiences of people.

How should I conceive my photographic practice when working through a participatory framework? What is the status of *engagement* in my ethnographic practice? Developing participatory methods might be counterproductive in order to understand peoples lives? How should we conceive the role of esthetics and plasticity when working with the participants?

Photography is part of a wider communicational repertoire, in which verbal testimonies, drawings and materials are as important as the graphic content of the photographs. Following this understanding,

in 2016 I started working with a group of 12 students with cognitive disabilities at the Ecole K of Sarcelles, a local elementary school. We explored the narrative dimensions of photography when depicting urban experience through a series of workshops.

In these exercises I studied the way photography may be a useful channel to explore the city through non-descriptive and non-representational narratives of children's lives and dreams. In particular, I collaborated with the participants to create fictional stories and to depict the visual experience of being and living in Sarcelles.

In this essay I present a recent experience with a group of young students. The idea is to talk about *photographic engagement,*[5] a set of practices in which photography could be used and seen as a tool for understanding different aspects of people's lives.

Engagement implies creation and collaboration. Rather than using photography as a means to describe the reality, we employ it as a route to (re)create a particular experience of their life in the city.

The (re)creation of the experience engages a creative, imaginative and non-representational photographic activity.

As a consequence, I adhere to an anthropological praxis which embraces visual materials as a way to discover new ways of thinking, creating and collaborating with people. Tim Ingold (2014, 2013) has widely criticized the assumption of ethnography as a process of 'data extraction'. Instead, he advocates for new creative and perceptive ways of doing anthropology through 'materials, movements and lines'. In visual anthropology, Sarah Pink widely developed Ingold's approaches (2015, 2013, 2006). She advocates for new phenomenological, sensory and collaborative practices in visual ethnography. The main objective of an anthropologist should be the 'production of knowledge and ways of knowing rather than … the collection of data' (Pink 2013, 35).

The 'formula' – which is usually taught to (under)graduate students – invites the anthropologist to conceive ethnography as an extractive process of data collection. Like a miner, ethnographers should be able to find the 'gold nugget', to observe and write people's actions during longs periods of time. Inductively, the ethnographer recreates the social and cultural structures and patterns of a community. Immersed in a complex and unstructured ecology of moral, cultural and political practices, she or he will elucidate large amounts of 'ethnographic data' through rigorous, long-term observational practices.

I decided to take some distance form this classic way of producing anthropological knowledge. Following Ingold and Pink,[6] I advocate for alternative ways of using and conceiving materials in visual anthropology.

> *If we embrace the idea of photography as a conversational practice (Gunthert 2015), we may explore the multiple ways people develop a discourse based on their own visual experiences.*

In that sense, photography may be a useful channel to understand and *depict* through a creative, embodied and reflexive activity.

Creative engagement

In Dominique's photo, a functionalist building is being crossed over by an airplane. There are some clouds and all the windows are closed. Dominique used this image to create a fictional story of the city.

He imagined he was traveling, that he was going back to a place he never knew, but he was stopped by the buildings and the fences of the city.

Dominique is a 12 years old boy, living in Sarcelles. The image was captioned by the following text:

'Dominique aperçoit un drapeau sur un bâtiment,
regarde des fils électriques,
va s'asseoir. Il est fatigué. Il a fait un long chemin.
Il rêve de prendre l'avion pour voyager.

Mais il reste sur son banc face aux barreaux comme en prison.'[7]

(Dominique, Ecole M. Sarcelles)

The text and the photograph is part of a wider creative exercise in which the entire group crafted a collective 'story of the city' through drawings, pictures and oral testimonies:

The city is not a fixed reality for them. Creating a narrative of the city implied the development of fictional stories. Instead of describing the city, they used photography in its non-representational dimension to create: most of the images don't have an 'index relationship' (*rapport indiciaire*) to the subject represented.

For instance, the following image does not relate to the act of falling or feeling the rain:

However, its plastic character recreates a sensory feeling of plunge. This photograph was involuntarily made by Fatou. The participants didn't have the technical training and equipment to control the shutter-speed, the aperture or the sensor sensitivity. However, by chance she produced this image when we were walking through a basketball field. When we saw it, they started playing with the image, they modeled and constructed a particular sense of falling through an active, collective and engaged process of creation:

Il pleut. « Je vais tomber ! »
Il s'approche du poteau du terrain de football et s'y accroche.
(It is raining. « I am going to fall! »
He approaches the soccer goal post and hangs on it.)

The creative engagement allows the photographers to invent and re-create their everyday life experiences. For the group of children, creating a story through a

variety of materials was a channel to think reflexively about the sensory dimension of the city.

> *I wasn't interested in the documentary dimension of the photographs. Instead, I wanted to discover how they might use the different materials to create something that for them may seem an 'everyday life experience in the city'.*

In that sense, they created a story in which we may find a variety of elements related to the urban experience: first, we may see an interest for the buildings. In Picture 1, the depiction of part of a social housing building (*tour HLM*) crossed over by an airplane gives them the representational elements to talk about a particular feeling: the act of dreaming. They want to fly but they can't, they remain on a bench, facing the bars, as if they were in prison.

Sarcelles is the 4th most impoverished city of the country and a significant part of its population has an immigrant background. The city is located not far from the Charles de Gaulle airport and 80% of the inhabitants live in what is called *le grand ensemble*. In this area most of the buildings are functionalist structures, characterized by holding one of the most diverse populations of France (more than '90 communities' (*la ville aux 90 communautés*). Dominique took the photographs in this zone, where he lives, near to the *Ecole K.*

This image concludes the story thought by Dominique.

> *The bars traverse the frame, the grass and some dead leaves. Dominique dreams to fly but he stays in prison, without a subject, the fences recreate the feeling of being confined. Bars, fences, buildings seem to be part of a greater space that make them feel enclosed.*

This visual exercise doesn't give us 'visual information' about the relationship between an impoverished city like Sarcelles, the visual experience of the children and the feeling of confinement. Instead, it explores a deeper dimension of the visual experience: the emotive, sensual and affective relationship existing between the visual elements of an image, the inventiveness of the author(s) and the material elements of the city (fences, buildings, airplane).

As such, photography was used in this case as part of a larger practice of storytelling. It was a creative practice in which the descriptive quality of photography has been less useful than the imaginative practice developed

collectively.

In this case, the photographic engagement was based on a narrative practice in which we tried to co-create rather than represent a fixed visual reality.

Conclusion

In this essay I advance the idea that photography may be an empowering tool to re-imagine the experience of people living in marginal cities through creative practices. In particular, I have been exploring children's experiences through imaginative activities of depiction, embodiment and creation: by crafting a collective story based on a variety of communicational materials such as photographs, drawings and writings, we were able to explore a non-representational activity of 'being in the city'.

This particular exercise was an opportunity to explore the fictional and narrative dimension of a photography in a research about life experiences in the *banlieue*. It was part of a larger research project in which I use different materials, approaches and methods to analyze people's experiences in urban settings. This exercise cannot be perceived as a new and 'naïve' way of depicting the city from the viewpoint of an 'innocent eye'.[8] Instead, it is an exercise of photographic engagement with a group of young students who live and interact in Sarcelles. We tried collectively to depict a personal experience through a practice of discussion and creation: in consequence, one of the photographic engagements we involved was a collective creation of an urban narrative.

'Et demain? ...l'anthropologue n'aura plus le monopole de l'observation, il sera lui-même observé, enregistré, lui et sa culture. Ainsi le film ethnographique nous aidera-t-il à «partager» l'anthropologie.' (Rouch 1979, 71)

[1] *Banlieue* is a French word to designate the suburbs. It is composed by the

words –*lieu* (place) and *ban-* (interdiction). The *banlieue* are the 'banned places', socially and politically dismissed by the State. The *banlieues* are spaces of confinement intersected by economical, cultural and racial forms of inequality (Agier 2015, 30)

[2] *i.e.* Atkinson (2001).

[3] The *banlieue* has been largely studied through classic ethnographic approaches *i.e.* Lepoutre 2008; Kokoreff 2007; Kokoreff and Lapeyronnie 2013.

[4] A city located in the northern suburbs of Paris.

[5] *cf. Leon*-Quijano, *forthcoming*

[6] I refer to Ingold and Pink, but there is a variety of authors who had already discussed the alternative ways of doing visual and sensory ethnography: Cox, Irving, and Wright 2015; Irving 2007; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2005; Taylor 1996; MacDougall 2005; Rouch 1979; Stoller 1997; Gómez Cruz 2012; Grasseni 2007; Hogan and Pink 2010; Fors, Bäckström, and Pink 2013.

[7] *Translation.* 'Dominique sees a flag on a building,

He looks at the electrical wires,

He sits down. He is tired. It has come a long way.

He dreams of taking an airplane and travelling.

But he remains on his bench facing the bars, like in a prison.'

[8] For critical approaches on participatory photography with children *cf.* Fattal 'fetishistic talk of a child's innocent eye' (2016, 41) and Kofod-Svenson (forthcoming).

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City Play: Collaborative Filmmaking with Children

Benjamin Llorens Rocamora
April, 2017

In Egypt, children are subject to a conservative and hierarchical public educational system. Underfunding, overcrowded classrooms and precarious infrastructure make the Egyptian school a place full of bored kids unmotivated to find a future through their studies, and a lot of old teachers who have had the same salary for decades and have a lack of interest to modify the 'status quo' in the classroom. The revolutionary efforts to reshape Egypt and especially the educational system have so far been in vain. The first post-revolution elected dictatorial regime of president Morsi and the following, current elected dictatorial regime of president Sisi have not made any significant changes in education.

Children in Egypt have experienced and participated in a revolution that was streamed to the world as an example of citizenship, making Egyptians proud again of being Egyptian.

Children thus were present in the streets and broadcast through the internet to audiences around the globe, becoming part of a collective struggle to rebuild their own social world. Yet, they've been forced to forget it and return to the same overcrowded classrooms and the same old boring lessons.

City Play was recorded in 2014, during the electoral campaign that officially made Sisi the head of state, when Cairo swapped the demonstrations in Tahrir Square for political arguments in every street café. The filmmaker/researcher Paloma Yañez Serrano worked with children (aged 6 to 15) to make a film about play, city and citizenship from their own perspectives, showing their experiences playing and exploring the meanings of play through the lens of her camera.

The first group of children was filmed in their environments of daily life; the others were participants of an educational project called Mini Medina (Mini City in Arabic), where the adult facilitators helped groups of sixty kids to recreate the buildings and the system of their own mini city. The children were first asked to make their ideal constitution and later given recycled materials to build and take roles in the city, experimenting and playing with professions but also with the urban dynamics. The camera was also introduced to the game by children playing to be reporters.

Visual methods used to engage with the participating children

Constantly, we produce or interact with photos, video, text, audio, shorts, clips or gifs, just like many of our informants. We take digital and physical notes of our lives, share them and interact through those notes with other people. As people who study the diversity of our human cultures, we need to accompany this transition and integrate its tools into our own work practices. This doesn't mean that fieldnotes should be forgotten, but to recognize that they have a role and can work in parallel to video and photo taking, audio recording or sketching. Actions of our everyday life that can be used in the benefit of the research while on the field, allowing an open door for an eventual transmedia presentation of our

anthropological endeavours. This means that as anthropologists who have been taught about the intricacies of field notes, we need to receive equal training on visual and sensory methods (Sanjek, 1990). These methods are not only fundamental to understand our ways of learning, knowing and representing the lives of others, but most importantly to understand our past, how we engage with our present and how we imagine our future. (Pink, 2009: 3). Specifically in the study of children, visual anthropological research has produced distinct understandings of the expression of children at play.

MacDougall, when using visual ethnography to reveal the children's world and imagination from their own perspective, suggested that, as the image is a reflexive object of the moment being lived by the filmmaker, if the image is to be reflective of children, the children should be active participants of image production (MacDougall 2006:3).

Visual collaboration with children is useful to create artistic bonds, interest and trust with the children. However, there is no easy way to collaboration as it leaves the outcome suspended, meaning the outcome is subject to the nature of the interaction between the filmmaker and the people in front and around the camera. While the hectic space of Mini-Medina only allows for snippets of children interventions as they move around the city, in the closed space of the other participants' house, collaboration allows for long and thorough interviews.

The main idea here is that collaboration is bound by a specific space and the activities taking place in that space.

If the activity is dominant, as in the case of Mini-Medina, collaboration is bound to take place within the rules, language and symbols of the children's city. Whereas if the dominant activity is an everyday life setting (i.e. home, a local street), collaboration can be projected towards future, envisioned or imaginative life worlds of children, exploring what they want to be, where they want to go and the meanings ascribed to things.

In this process, the presence of the camera as a technological object acts as a bridge between the world of the researcher and children. The researcher and children worked with a DSLR Camera Cannon 70D. Very few of these kids had seen a professional camera up close, let alone playing with and operating it. Often with children, there is a tendency to fear their carelessness and rapid movements when they are given sensitive objects like a camera. However, the reality is that

> *giving a camera to a child is an act of trust in the part of the researcher and an act of responsibility in the part of the child.*

Trusting the child first with the equipment and later with the technical operation allows a unique bond to emerge between the child and the filmmaker, but also between the child and the camera. On the one hand, the child becomes excited to participate and engage in the research project, being creative about their ideas and willing to share their personal stories, while being directed and framed on camera. On the other hand, the children learn to see the world through the camera, creating scenes and narratives and showing what is important for them as they are given the opportunity to represent themselves.

From fieldwork to the screen: City Play

The double use of film as a means to inspire creativity and imagination among children, as well as to represent them from their own perspective can be seen in some of the scenes.

A clear example is the final scene of the film, when a conflict appears between the citizens of Mini Medina, after some kids steal from others. The footage was recorded by the researcher and by the kids playing to be reporters. While Paloma was recording the discussion from distance and asking questions to children individually, the kids that were recording were trying to have the closest shot of who was shouting and screaming. The montage shows Paloma's footage first, representing the problem as an outsider, filming the kids that have been robbed

complaining to the camera about the lack of interest and help of Mini Medina's police. Later, the scene collapses into a big scuffle inside the play city space, when some policeman catches a thief and the other kids try to have their money back. We see a lot of children crossing in front of the camera as it moves, trying to reach the epicentre of the brawl. The light changes, parameters go out of control, the image shakes and focus is hardy found; this part was filmed by the children. The symbiosis between the camera and the filmmaker not only applies to how the scene is recorded but also to what is recorded by the camera. When Paloma is filming, the kids are less excited when they speak to her, they respect the adult task of recording and they try to make some room for the camera if they realize that they are in the middle of the shot. However, when children are recording, the others will interact with the filmmaker child as an equal, revealing their attitude and disposition to play with the camera as well, shouting and making funny faces directly to the camera in a way that they wouldn't do with the adult researcher.

This mixture of performativity and world discovery brings certain magic to the picture and the investigation.

The more the children engage with the camera, the more creative they become. The magic is based on the movement of ideas, which evolve from day to day. This was particularly impressive with some children from the 'daily life group'. Some of the elder children (15 years old), when filming with their friends, were very keen on the idea of making a visual research about play together. The first day, when they engaged with the camera to talk about their 'own' play, this was enacted as a funny but superficial sketch of a boy asking a girl for her number with an extra tone of Egyptian humour. The second day, they did a sketch about exams cheating, showing the play that goes on among the students, but also talking about the teacher's behaviour and corruption in school, making a clear point that the whole education system is a game itself. Finally, the third day, they started considering politics as play. They talked about the Revolution and how Morsi and Sisi had messed it up. During those days, Sisi had released a

manipulative music video calling the population to vote for him. The young teenagers thought the video was a mockery of democracy and decided to make a videoclip mocking it. In three days they had expanded their definition of play from girls and boys flirting, to the whole political system.

For a researcher, this rapid process is hard to follow and many times there is no time to question these narrative orientations and film choices in depth. They are partial fragments of a building-up-truth that the children are working out through improvisation. However, such truth is not based on imitations and mimicking of the adult world, rather on an 'inherent motive to use their intellect, creative thinking and imagination in attempting to explain the world to themselves and exercise influence upon it' (Ariel, 2002:91). Although children can develop different fantasy worlds from a single object, the first contact that children have with the object relates to their cultural background.

In a gamble of real-life possibilities, the child experiments and chooses which possibilities should integrate and determine real civic life.

Ariel proposes, 'Children find the raw materials out of which they create their make-believe play in the physical and cultural environment in which they grow up'. In this context, images, narratives and play develop as the different players attempt to integrate their views on how reality should be.

City Play (2015)

32 minutes
Director: Paloma Yáñez Serrano

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Audiovisual research practice in the global era

Paloma Yáñez Serrano
April, 2017

Time has shortened, space has shrunk, social relations have stretched and information keeps coming as intensive flows. This article explores the role audiovisual media has in reshaping time and space in the era of global interconnectedness, outlining two basic principles for the process of image production. First, despite continuous development, technology is still restricted in relation to the multimedia nature of human perception—data in its raw form—this limitation and its potentiality for ethnographic practice should be taken into account in any effort of visual production. Second, as social interaction expands, social actors simultaneously experience the global and the local, reacting to close up signs and attentive to distant prospects, possessing both near sight and far sight. This introduction presents the work of six young visual ethnographers from the Visual Research Network, who have taken these two seemingly obvious statements from a theoretical standpoint and explored them through visual

ethnographic practice.

Producing a visual practice thematic thread, the aim is to show how visual research in social sciences is adapting to and reinventing how the visual medium is used and most importantly how it is read.

Using ethnographic examples from Egypt, Colombia, Kurdistan, Brazil and Congo (DRC), the objective is to show how researchers can use collaboration, experimentation, photography, sound and film to draw clear links between our global and local interconnection, as well as how we sense, feel and understand, the world around us.

When the ethnographer chooses visual tools as a research method there are two significant changes to the processes of fieldwork and data collection. On one hand, the camera becomes both an element of the material environment in which the ethnographer is participating and essential to the ethnographer's forms of experience, engagement, and participation in that environment (Pink 2015:100). On the other hand, the material produced becomes part of the understanding of a place, a visual interpretation that penetrates audiences and provides new entanglements that reshape place.

In visual ethnography, the visual practice is understood as a co-constituent of the ethnographic place and as such, a presence that lingers within the reality of social aesthetics, relations and interactions.

In this view, place is first constituted through the social, material and sensorial relations of a given site and it is simultaneously remade as it is recorded in the camera. Place is later reconstituted, as the viewers imagine and ascribe personal and cultural meanings to the representation. In this process, as images, frames and visual narratives reshape space, time is transformed through the editing process, altering, compressing and providing rhythm to the lives, cultures and spaces reflected in the film outcome. The threefold process of place making in

visual research does not only transform a place, but also its time and space, with the outcome being a fragment of a partially true reality.

Visual Anthropologists have for long studied the complexity of space and place making, focusing on the different forms of experience and representation that develop in ethnographic settings. Using visual media as observational and objectifying tools to *represent* experience,

> *anthropology offers several insights that can be useful to unpack the different routes of multisensorial knowing in order to research how sensory structures and social aesthetics are created.*

In October 2016 a group of young social scientists and visual practitioners set a project to identify how two theoretical notions crucial to grasp the ethos and logos in the image production process, namely sensoriality and bifocality, could be explored in practice. Founding the Visual Research Network (VRN), the young visual ethnographers will share in this thematic thread the ethnographic encounters and visual experiments they undertook to unveil the potential of the visual language to help understand the complexity of our sensory worlds and collaborative experiences.

The first concept is that sensorial experience takes place in different formats making reception inherently multimedia as a result of the multimodality of our semiotic world. Human perception takes place in the body in the form of sound, objects, visual deign, gestures, textures and actions. This is made possible through our senses, which are 'attuned in a quite specific way to the natural environment', providing us with differentiated access to the world (Kress & Leeuwen 2000:184). The mix media sensory experience received by the body is then translated in the brain into cognition. Following the same process,

> *'data' is what we are able to perceive in the field, which 'we perceive through all our senses, including sight, hearing, touch, smell and event taste', so while our means of recording data are limited, data in the form it reaches the*

researcher is 'composed of diverse media' (Dicks, 2006:78).

The disjuncture between the 'restricted' media used in 'data-records' and the multimedia nature of human perception, including the abstract and unobservable grammars and the 'non-material resources of meaning-making' is what Kress and Leeuwen have defined as the multimodality paradigm (Dicks, 2006:78). The camera, as a limited technology, can only represent a portion of human perception, giving humans the possibility to check against their own experience the modes of seeing and understanding audiovisual media proposes.

The multimodality of human perception and the potential for representation of the visual medium should not be seen as a limitation, but as a point of access to the semiotic world through the visual, not as dominant, but as part of an interconnected sensory experience.

This can be especially useful in research with children, when trying to unpack how their spoken and unspoken grammars translate to our understandings of childhood, education and learning. The first two articles of this visual ethnography thematic thread focus specifically on children's ethnographies, exploring the possibilities of the medium to communicate and represent the sensoriality, materiality and significance children give to their life experiences. Benjamin Llorens Rocamora and Paloma Yáñez Serrano narrate the experiences of fieldwork in Egypt, filming in collaboration with children and exploring their perception of play and work in post-revolutionary Cairo. Llorens and Serrano guide the reader into a game world created for children to experiment with the dynamics of the city, through the pretend-profession role-play of the alternative education project, Mini Medina. They describe how the camera was introduced into the city-game as a tool for those children playing to be reporters. In this way, the camera stopped being bound to the researcher's own project as it began to integrate the children's own game world, revealing not only a representation of the game through given frames or images but also a document of the corporeal embodiment of the filmmaker child. In this way the viewer can not only

understand the context and actions of a given game, but the ways of playing and seeing from the perspective of the playing child.

Building as well on experimental visual methods, and equally concerned with children's perceptions of urban infrastructure, Camilo Leon-Quijano shares some valuable snippets of his ethnography working with a group of 10 students with cognitive disabilities in the *Ecole K.* of Sarcelles, the biggest 'social housing city' of France. Using photography as a means to (re)create children's dreams and expectations, Quijano works with a mixture of fiction and reality, guiding children into creative narrative and photo production inspired by their own imaginative life worlds. In a similar way to the use of the game in the Egyptian ethnography, Quijano proposes, through creative fictional and non-fictional engagement with photography, we can access 'the emotive, sensual and affective relationship existing between the visual elements of an image, the inventiveness of the author(s) and the material elements of the city' (this thread). Explaining through aesthetics the shapes and structures in our urban environment that enhance or impair the dreams and expectations for the future of our younger and most vulnerable inhabitants.

The second notion that became clear at the first VRN meeting, has come as a result of global communication flows, providing that humans simultaneously experience near sight and far sight. Community and locality are no longer given or natural, no longer exclusive to face-to-face relations, they are rather constituted by a wider set of social and spatial relations, 'conceived less as a matter of 'ideas' than of embodied practices that shape identities and enable resistances' (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:6). The conception of time and space is drawn from a simultaneous understanding the global and the local, what Peters defined as the condition of 'bifocality' in communication theory, suggesting that social actors possess both 'near sight' and 'far sight' (1997:75). He traces 'bifocality' to the eighteenth century, when the creation of the press allowed information to spread across the globe, through newspapers, novels, statistics, encyclopedia, dictionaries, and panoramas. Today, we not only receive information but are able to produce it at much higher speed and lower cost,

transforming our social role from receivers to creators. This entails a responsibility that is often unaccounted for, which implies connecting global flows of capital, cultures and humans, with specific landscapes, bodies and modes of experience that exist and change through time.

Negotiating near and distant is as complex as negotiating filmmaker/research/person roles, it is a matter of complex identities that are constantly in motion, a type of movement that film encaptures into a narrated time, but which will continue to move and change long after the film is done.

When describing her ethnographic encounters, Lana Askari (this thematic thread), suggests that the global is intrinsic to the local, when trying to understand future imaginaries and the conditions and structures of urban infrastructure in Kurdistan. Through the story of Mihemed, a Kurdish journalist from Kobane (Syrian Kurdistan), who lives in a refugee camp in Slemani (Iraqi Kurdistan), Askari reveals a story of turbulent past leading to confused futures. Kobane is a symbol of Kurdish resistance against the Islamic State since 2015 when the Kurdish forces liberated the city, yet proud Kurds like Mihemed cannot return due to the ongoing war. Stuck in Suleimani because of conflicting global powers and the imminent treat of ISIS, Mihemed and his family are forced to live in a displaced locality, reinforced by shops, restaurants and a bridge named after Kobane. Visually engaging with the city and the everyday life experiences of Mihemed, Askari makes clear that Mihemed's conception of the future respond to his near and far sight, simultaneity of experiencing the reality of Kobane and Slemani. Through the aesthetic of film but also the engagement with participants, an account that makes clear social actors have near and far sight, even when hopes for the future seem to lack.

Daniel Lema Vidal and Clara Kleininger take our readers to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, exploring the intricacies of the collaborative film project Nosso Morro. In a truly collaborative ethnographic piece, they bring their two distinct, yet complementary perspectives on how six ethnographic filmmakers made a

documentary workshop for 10 young people from two adjacent districts, Gávea and Rocinha, the neighbourhood with highest development index and the largest favela of the city, respectively. The workshop was a learning place, a 'meeting point' for the 6 international filmmakers and the 10 young participants to make a film about their communities. Lema and Kleininger suggest the workshop served to explore the teenagers' visions, not only of the narrative as the contextual local, but also to explore global flows, networks, influences and power struggles that are translated into violence, fear and marginalisation. The workshop also represented a space to explore feelings beyond their grammatical interface allowing the participants to get closer to their sensorial experiences in their effort to represent the people in their communities. Lema and Kleininger argue that by including the workshop in the final edit, not only they recognize the ethnographic importance of the visual production, but most importantly they produce a commensurable engagement between the ethnographers (6 international researchers), filmmakers (workshop participants) and viewers that goes beyond the entertaining narrative in favour of a sensorial understanding of the 'meeting point'.

Crapanzano, contesting Geertz's definition of anthropology as 'reading a text over the shoulders of those to whom it properly belongs' (1973, p. 452), claims that this position would 'cast our shadows over that book', pushing the 'other' to close it (1986:52). Opening a new book, through the use of collaborative music videos in Goma, DRC, Eugenio Giorgianni brings a closure to our thematic thread. Giorgianni's ethnography shows how music videos, allow for compromised collaboration, mediating the process of sense making while observing, and being observed. Unveiling the dynamics, aesthetics, insights and rhythms brought together through the production of the song and video clip, Amani Kila Siku – Peace Every Day (kiSwahili), the article shows how musicians and researchers worked together to represent the need of local people to overcome the endless conflict that afflicts the North Kivu region, a warzone until 2013. Unrepresented and underused in social sciences research, the video clip is proposed as a route to understand how participants see and relate to the world through their musical

and visual creations, as well as a route to a collaborative representation of sensory experience.

Conclusion

In brief our notions are simple: it is enough to look at our own lives.

> *We simultaneously live local lives with global connections and at the same time there is a visceral certainty that our feelings, our sensations are basic to our understanding of the world, beyond what technology can capture.*

Our ethnographic attempts are limited, simply because a camera cannot produce a record of perception. Nonetheless, through the lens we can make subtle hints. In this process, our images, our words, our senses are what matter.

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"EUER WEH": Accra station woe

Michael Stasik
April, 2017

EUER WEH – German for 'your woe', reads the car inscription on the bonnet. An unwitting meaning, residue of the former German fire truck, which had FEUERWEHR written on it. Apparently, the first and last letter ('F' and 'R') went missing in the course of its transformation into a tropicalized Ghanaian passenger bus. The picture, too, was captured unwittingly. I was documenting some of the shop interiors at my main field side, a central bus station in

Ghana's capital Accra. And I therefore had my camera at hand when all of a sudden people began rushing towards the nearby railway tracks, where a large fire broke out. The car then passed through my camera frame while I was taking pictures of the fire (note the billows of smoke in the background). Within minutes, the fire destroyed a whole slum area, making hundreds homeless. There was no fire truck whatsoever. It was a woeful day for many.

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Call for contributions: *Bus Stations in Africa*

Bus stations are among the most prominent locations of everyday social and economic activity in Africa. The African lorry park, motor park, gare routière or terminal rodoviário is a hub of travel, transport and mobility; a centre of trade, commerce and the informal service industry; and a nodal point for the circulation of value, knowledge, meaning and ideology. Issues pertaining to social, cultural, economic and political domains fold together in Africa's bus stations in exceptionally dense ways. Comparable to African marketplaces, they are sites of proliferous encounters, frequently accommodating a dizzying multiplicity of people, practices, activities and relations. Yet as Paul Nugent (2010: 96) has recently remarked, while 'markets have received their fair share of academic treatment, lorry parks have not received nearly enough attention as interactive spaces'. Indeed, nearly all studies related to African bus stations appear to have emerged as subsidiary products of research on other subjects.

While building upon the scattered body of works on African bus stations, in this collection of articles we want to put the 'interactive space' of the station at the centre of attention. We invite Africanist researchers from all disciplinary backgrounds to present their approaches to the significance, multifunctionality and diversity of what Polly Hill (1984: 215) has suggestively termed 'peoples'

airport[s]' in Africa. We welcome historical and contemporary perspectives on bus stations in both urban and rural settings. Contributions should be grounded in thick empirical descriptions and address the bus station space from one or several of the following angles: the prominence of stations as somewhat infamous places of work, trade, travel, commuting, loiter and crime; their perhaps more hidden quality as sites of dwelling, refuge, conviviality, rumours and everyday cultural production; their critical role in African (auto)mobilities, road regimes and infrastructures; and/or their intricate relation to changing dynamics of (urban) governance, (de)regulation, privatisation and the political economy at large.

If interested, please send a 500-word abstract to Michael Stasik (michael.stasik@uni-bayreuth.de) and Sidy Cissokho (sidy.cissokho@ed.ac.uk) by May 1, 2017. Please forward this call to all those who might be interested, and feel free to contact us if you have any further questions.

Fieldwork among comedians: A Danish anthropologist trying to be funny

Morten Nielsen
April, 2017

"Why are stand-up comedians better anthropologists than I am?"

A few years ago, I started asking myself that question. As an anthropologist, I am supposed to know about all the cultural stuff that goes on when people get together: How we make sense of each other and all the weird habits that we come up with. For instance, why people in some parts of the world sleep with dogs in their beds whereas, in other places, dogs are considered as a favorite dish. Anthropologists make their living by thinking long and hard about such important issues.

But since I first saw George Carlin do his amazing bit about the seven dirty words that you cannot say, I have been haunted by the slightly uncomfortable thought that perhaps comedians are better anthropologists than I can ever be.

Much better, in fact. In just a few sentences, Carlin says more about social hypocrisy and everyday censorship than I can cram into a 40 page high-browed academic tirade. Over time, the idea emerged that perhaps I could somehow study comedians as they hone their skills and thereby come to understand why they are as good anthropologists as they are. To be perfectly honest, I wanted to steal their secret. This year, it has finally happened! From January to June 2017 I am in New York with one objective: To study how comedians work. And, as agonizing and painful as it will undoubtedly be, to do stand-up myself.

Marc Maron comes to the rescue

In Denmark, stand-up comedy has never been considered as an art form. There are a few comedy clubs in Copenhagen (the capital of Denmark) and one in Aarhus (Denmark's 2nd largest city), but it is rare that Danes choose a comedy show as their evening entertainment. Unless the local beer garden is closed, of course. Stand-up comedy has been an essential part of popular culture in the US since the 1950s but it is only within the last 10-15 years that it has become a household phenomenon in Denmark. Even today, we don't have a Danish comedy channel or regular late night talk shows where up-and-coming comedians are profiled.

We have been living in the dark ages of comedy for a very, very long time.

Most of my life, I have therefore been blissfully ignorant about the world of comedy. Of course I knew that Steve Martin existed and had lived a childhood as a black sharecropper and that Eddie Murphy looked his absolute best in a red leather suit, but I did not understand how important comedy was to American popular culture. A few years ago, I started to watch a lot of YouTube clips of comedians being interviewed on late night talk shows. Initially I used it as a way of avoiding lethal boredom while brushing my teeth at night but the YouTube clips soon invaded my work life also. Several times during the day I would stop whatever I was doing to find one more clip of Robin Williams's maniacal ramblings on Letterman or Albert Brooks cracking up Johnny Carson with his

absurd inventions. Those clips fascinated me but I couldn't figure out why.

It was only when I started listening to Marc Maron's amazing podcast series WTF that I realized why I had found those clips so incredibly fascinating. In Maron's insightful interviews with some of the world's greatest comedians, they discuss talk show interviews and how comics would prepare bits to be used during their conversation with the host weeks in advance. I simply did not know that: The dialogues between guests and hosts were often not regular conversations – they were prepared comedy bits! This must sound incredibly naïve to Americans having been spoon fed with late night talk shows since infancy but please bear with me: As I mentioned earlier, Danes have been living in the comedy dark ages for a very long time. Even today, a Danish talk show interview is usually a serious conversation between two serious adults talking about serious and adult things.

It might not have been the intention with these talk shows but you do die a little every time you watch them.

And then, suddenly, I was watching talk show interviews, which were amazing performances of beautifully crafted bits and improvised madness. I loved it!

Comedians are better anthropologists than I am

I began to use Marc Maron's interviews as a menu for my daily consumption of comedy. Within days, I was incessantly devouring clips with Patton Oswalt, Sarah Silverman and Zach Galifianakis. Oh, and Maria Bamford! I must have watched every single YouTube clip that exist of her.

But it was only when I discovered Louis CK that I began to think of comedy in relation to my work as an anthropologist. I have never laughed as hard as when I was watching "Louis CK: Live at the Beacon Theatre". I remember having to pause the show several times to catch my breath and wipe my eyes. I honestly think that Louis CK is the funniest person in the universe. And he is extremely insightful. A comedic philosopher. In the opening monologue to his last SNL

performance, he discusses "mild racism": "I have mild racism. It's the best I could do coming out of the 70s, 'cause it was a very racist decade". Louis CK admits to being surprised when finding out that a pizza restaurant was "run by four black women... You don't usually see that; four black women running a pizza place". Then he gives the example of being in a gas station late at night when a young man comes in wearing a hooded sweat shirt. "If he is white, I'll think 'oh, he's an athlete. If he is black, unless he has a big smile on his face, then I become mildly racist and this is what I think: 'That's fine... everything is fine... (looks at the audience with a nervous stare) Nothing is going to happen. Of course I am fine. Why did I even think that for a second.'"

In just a few sentences, Louis CK manages to articulate a deep insight about everyday racism – and being very funny at the same time. To me, he had essentially made an anthropological observation: he registered something important about what happens when people with different backgrounds interact and (mis)interpret each other's actions. And he got the message across in an easily accessible format – a joke – without sacrificing the nuances of the insight. Not bad! It left me with a burning desire to explore how he and other comedians do it: How do comedians become better anthropologists than me?

I spent almost a year developing an idea for a research project that would hopefully get me to New York to study the wild and exotic stand-up comedians in their natural habitat.

In collaboration with a Scottish colleague, I ended up submitting an application for a project composed of five sub-projects of which my study on stand-up comedy is one. Just before Christmas 2015, we received the good news: The project had been approved. I was going to New York!

Comedians in their natural habitat

I arrived in New York 29 December 2016 with my wife and two sons and 11 January I went to my first comedy shows. It was an early show at the Stand with

Aaron Berg as energetic host introducing a long list of comedians I would come to see many times again over the next couple of months. I remember being really taken aback by the intensity of Berg's crowd work. When he entered the room, people were quietly chatting at the tables and 5 minutes later, he had the audience roaring with laughter. And I remember laughing hysterically at Ben Bailey's quirky observations ("should we briefly address how close my head is to the ceiling?")

My plan was to go to at least 3 comedy shows each week and talk to as many comedians as possible about their craft.

A colleague had put me in contact with Justin Herman, an excellent writer and comedian, who is making a name for himself at comedy venues throughout the city. On a rainy day in mid-January, we met up at a café in Cobble Hill where Justin gave me a brief introduction to the art of joke-writing and carefully described the layout of New York's comedy world. Justin also introduced me to Liz Miele, who is a very funny comedian with a unique approach and wonderful laid-back rhythm. Besides providing me with crucial insights about the craft of comedy, Liz has been incredibly generous in connecting me with both up-and-coming and established comedians in New York.

Since then, I have met up with many funny and insightful comedians, who openheartedly feed me with invaluable insights about their art: Shane Torres, Lance Weiss, Nore Davis, Yedoye Travis, Ian Fidance, Kyle Ayers, Khalid Rahmaan. The list continues.

What I know about comedy so far

Three observations from my interviews so far: First, comedy is hard work! All of those comedians I have interviewed so far work very, very hard on honing their skills. In order to make good comedy, you need to have a heightened awareness about everything that goes on around you – and you need to get as much stage time as possible even if this involves performing for two drunk foreigners and a

nosey researcher (...who is also a foreigner...). Second, comedy requires honesty and boldness. Comedians draw on material from their own lives and do not hesitate to expose the darkest layers of human existence: mental instabilities, dysfunctional families, substance abuse, broken relationships.

I am truly in awe of the fearlessness and persistence with which many of the comedians I have met expose the most intimate sides of their personal lives in order to make the performances as fun, honest and real as possible.

And, third, the art and craft of comedy cannot be taught. You can learn about the structure of a joke – setup and punchline, tags and segways – but you will not get to understand what comedy is without experiencing it firsthand.

It took me a while to appreciate what the implications of the last insight had to be but in mid-February, on the train home after having seen Justin Herman do a great set at QED in Queens, I realized what I had to do. A key aspect of being an anthropologist is our methodological approach, which is called 'participant-observation'. This basically implies that we do whatever the people we are studying are doing – and make observations about it in little notebooks every time we go to the toilet. That's why, by the way, that anthropologists run to the toilet all the time. Sitting on the N train that night, it dawned on me that I actually hadn't done my job properly. I had talked to comedians about their craft and gone to comedy shows but I hadn't tried to do comedy. There was no way around it: I had to enter the world of comedy myself.

In order to learn the craft of comedy, I had to become a comedian!

Can anthropologists be funny?

Although comedy cannot be taught, I decided that some formal teaching would probably be a good idea before venturing into the unknown world of comedy on my own. I signed up for Veronica Mosey's course through the Comedy Cellar and Tuesday 28 February I showed up for our first class. 10 students had signed up

for the course and during three intensive hours, Veronica gave us a first taste of what is to come. I had expected the first class to be a soft start where we would be introduced to the basic ground rules of comedy but we would definitively not be doing jokes yet. It was clear from the beginning, however, that Veronica wanted us to try out any joke material that we might already have.

I had a half-baked idea for a joke, which I introduced with a weak and not particularly convincing voice.

And let me just say that the response was not overwhelming. Here's the idea: My mother once admitted to me that she was disappointed with my looks when I was born. Apparently, my head was pear-shaped and my mother's immediate impression was that it looked weird. She actually said that to me when I was about 12 years old! So, sitting with the other aspiring comedians, I told that anecdote and continued: "Only recently did I realize that she might not have been completely mistaken about the fruit-shape of my head. I was standing in the fruit section in our local Keyfood and this guy started looking at me in a weird way. He kept going between looking at the pear in his hand and looking directly at me. At one point he started nodding, as if he had suddenly realized something and then he said: "I know what you are doing…" To be fair, I know that it is not a good joke! But I felt really proud of myself. It was a fun idea, I thought, and I had given it a great twist. At that moment, I wouldn't have been surprised if Veronica had asked me if she could use it in her show. I would have said yes. But instead: Total silence! After a brief pause, the person next to me cleared her throat and looked at me: "I don't get what the Keyfood guy was on about…". Veronica intervened: "I think it needs a bit more work, Morten. It just doesn't sound realistic".

Besides making me realize that I am probably not yet capable of crafting a joke that is genuinely funny (to other than myself, that is!), the first class also proved to me that comedians truly are some of the finest artists I have ever come across.

To be able to make a joke work in front of a room full of strangers; that is art in its purest form!

So, let me finish with the best joke I have heard during my short time in New York. It's pretty dark but I just find it insanely funny. I heard Adrienne Iapalucci do it on the Artie Lang Show. Here it is: "My boyfriend told me he was going to kill himself and I was like: 'great, now I won't be able to kill myself or people will think we were in love".

Featured [image](#) (cropped) by [Moayn Brenn](#) (flickr.com, [CC BY 2.0](#))

The Moving Matters Traveling Workshop: An Interview with Susan Ossman

Helen Faller
April, 2017

Anthropologist and writer Helen Faller interviews Susan Ossman, Artistic Director of the [Moving Matters Traveling Workshop](#) and professor of Anthropology at University of California, Riverside.

Helen: What is the Moving Matters Traveling Workshop?

Susan: The MMTW is a collective of artists and scholars who develop art together based on their shared experience of living in several countries. The project started in 2013 at a seminar where anthropologists and artists developed "creative responses" to my book *Moving Matters, Paths of Serial Migration*. Since then we have met in changing locations to address topics related to migration and mobility from our perspectives as "serial migrants" in art, exhibitions and

performances. The MMTW grows through a process of progressive "inhabitations." Just like a serial migrant, it settles into one country after another. We have traveled to California, France, the Netherlands and Romania. Berlin is coming up in June.

What do you mean by serial migrant?

The concept of serial migration is one I proposed in [2004](#), explored with other serial migrant scholars and artists in *The Places We Share* (Lexington 2007) and then developed in detail in the fieldwork that produced *Moving Matters.*

Serial migrants are people who have repeated the experience of migrating and settling into a new country. Much has been written about the "betweeness" of immigrants caught between two countries. But what happens when the immigrant moves on? How does a third move beyond "immigration" alter the subject and her sense of self? This is becoming increasingly common. Serial migrants are shaped by several different regimes of identification. They often shift class positions as they migrate. This poses a series of fruitful conundrums for social theory.

I argue that different migratory paths produce distinctly different forms of subjects; a kind of political choreography is emerging in which access to movement or requirements to move in certain ways produce forms of cultural and social diversity that are not captured by static categories of identity. The work of the MMTW contributes to opening up new horizons for imagining this emerging social world.

What do the artists and scholars of the MMTW do that relates to their status as serial migrants?

One thing I observed in my research was that, rather than talking about becoming "integrated," serial migrants adopted a project orientation to feeling "involved" and "at home." So the MMTW generates a social milieu of people who are temporarily involved and at home in the workshop space.

The workshop focuses on the common path of its participants, creating a setting that enables critical thought about the nature of belonging, community, and identity. Because none of these is taken for granted.

Embracing the identity of "serial migrant" in the "artificial," mobile milieu of the project has proven to be not only intellectually provocative, but also emotionally significant for artists and artist/anthropologists born in different countries and into various social strata. With the MMTW, serial migrants find a space of commonality. Embodied, performative, aesthetic, and affective work about the specific routes of individual participants is encouraged by and interwoven with collaborative reflections and productions. Each workshop includes a new mix of participants and brings in new participants.

Who are MMTW members?

Participants have been labeled refugees or political exiles, love migrants or foreign students, economic immigrants, expats or resident aliens. They have been called cosmopolitans or global nomads. Some of the artists who will join the workshop in Berlin are currently refugees. Such categories can obscure alternate identities and the way serial migrants pass not only through multiple categories, but several ways of construing identities. Getting a sense of who a serial migrant *is* requires both listening to his or her story and recognizing that multiple regimes of value and identification have shaped him. These are frameworks that we might study, but that remain outside our own experience.

The art of the MMTW includes diverse languages, forms of movement, palettes, and rhythms. We bring these to our work as serial migrants, not just as representatives of some cultural milieu we represent. So cultural repertoires are not objectified, but associated in a lively way. As serial migrants we naturally work amid several repertoires, which is a subject of study in itself. Our art tends to draw attention to path-making processes. For instance, performances always literally move the audience through several spaces, as this film of us preparing for a performance shows.

We think that our work is distinctive because it is the result not only of reflections on individual migratory experiences, but the way these have been told, interwoven, and conceptualized through the MMTW's sustained program of collaborative research.

How do you find sites and collaborators?

A lot depends on individual initiative and chance. Sometimes the director of a cultural center hears about the project and invites us to develop a workshop. Guillaume Lasserre heard about the MMTW and invited us to perform at the Pavillon Vendome in Clichy. Olga Sezneva got the Allard Pierson Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities in Amsterdam interested in the project. Alec Balesecu was an early participant who drew Ioana Paun into the project to develop "My Story/Your History" in Bucharest, leading to a participatory intervention called "Map quest" which we further developed in a Riverside, California performance in 2016.

Financing the MMTW is challenging. We don't charge for our exhibitions or performances. We have received support from our universities but our activities don't fit grant cycles. Projects evolve too fast. Some individual donors have been extremely generous.

Tell me more about the anthropology/art connection.

I am a visual artist as well as an anthropologist (Ossman 2014). I've devised a variety of collaborative projects that cross art practice and anthropological research in different ways (Allison and Ossman 2014; Ossman 2016). Right now, I'm preparing an exhibition called "*Wissen/ Schaffen*" (knowledge/making) based on participant observation at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin.

The depth of engagement and continuity over several years of the MMTW is nothing new for anthropologist. It is much less common in art, even at its most collaborative and participatory. The fieldwork-like processes of iteration across sites is extremely fruitful for developing individually authored pieces as well as

collaborative work.

For me, this process has encouraged permeability between art and scholarship. My installation "[Mediterranean Sea Scroll](#), which includes a bibliography while "Gather Wood, Gather words" plays with conventions of museum texts.

My Mediterranean Sea Scroll, by Susan Ossman

An installation of "Gather Wood, Gather Words" by Susan Ossman at the Allard Pierson Museum of Mediterranean Antiquities in Amsterdam (Read the texts [here.](#))

Why did you want to curate a workshop in Berlin?

Border walls are multiplying at a frightening pace. So is the number of people

displaced by war, famine, global warming, and economic crises. These people need walls. Berlin is the ideal site from which to contemplate walls as barriers and protection, given the symbolism of the Berlin Wall and the number of people fleeing war in the Middle East and Asia who have found refuge in Germany. We're honored to be working with Pastor Thomas Jeutner at the *Kapelle der Versöhnung* and Lisa Strehmann of the Refugee Office of Protestant Dinary, Berlin North East.

The Chapel of Reconciliation on Berlin's former border zone is an intensely symbolic, immensely moving site. It is part of the Berlin Wall Monument. The inner sanctuary is protected by an immense earth wall composed of the remains of the church that formerly stood on the site before the DDR destroyed it in 1985. The outer walls are open to the surrounding landscape, which was once the border zone between the two Germanys. It will be an amazingly complex and challenging space to develop an exhibition and performance.

How will meeting in Berlin advance the goals of the MMTW?

The chapel receives about 1,500 visitors each day. They come from all over the world to remember "The Wall." We think that they will be especially open to experiencing art that ties this history to current events. Being able to develop an exhibition and performance of this magnitude brings our project to a new level of public awareness. Through our art will share our "moving" perspectives on walls as borders, shelters, and sanctuaries. The MMTW underscores how "paths" make us all. It demonstrates that recognizing common paths can be a source of global solidarity.

This seems like an expensive endeavor. How do you finance it?

Our performances and exhibitions are always free and open to the public. We don't make money from any ticket sales. And our local collaborators provide space and logistical support. Sometimes they'll pay for printing or sandwiches

Those of us who have academic positions or make a solid living from our art pay our own way. Sometimes we even cross-finance. So I may buy a painting from a

fellow MMTW member so that she can purchase a plane ticket to attend a workshop. But as we gain momentum, we are coming to realize that this self-financing model isn't sustainable. So we're working on creating a fund and for this workshop we've designed an indiegogo campaign. Is it okay if I include the link?

Certainly. I think Allegra Lab's readers might be interested in supporting MMTW's workshop, since your explorations speak so closely to many of our experiences.

Support can also come in the form of [sharing the link with friends](), if you're not in a position to make a donation yourself. Every dollar, every euro counts. Really.

Thanks for your time, Susan.

Thanks for your time too, Helen. One more thing. Allegra Lab readers should stay tuned for upcoming pieces by three other MMTW members. They will discuss the mutually generative relationship between scholarship and art, offering a glimpse into the making of MMTW's "Walls" at the Wall Berlin Workshop.

[Susan Ossman](https://) (Creative Director and Artistic Producer) is an anthropologist and an artist who has made her home in France, Morocco, the UK and the US. She is the author of books on globalization, migration, media and aesthetics. Susan has developed cross-disciplinary collaborative art projects that include On the Line, Lifeworks and the Moving Matters Traveling Workshop. Her paintings, installations and multi-media work developed in the course of these migrations have been exhibited in Europe and the US. She is Professor of Anthropology and Global Studies at University of California, Riverside.

HSR II: Consequences of anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies

Allegra
April, 2017

In the first of two questions of the second roundtable, human smuggling experts share their views on the (un)intended consequences of anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies. We assembled a range of responses that shed light on the question from various angles.

What are the intended/unintended consequences of anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies?

[Anna Triandafyllidou](#)

European University Institute

Europe's intense focus on migration control when negotiating with countries of origin and transit neglects several problems. First, prioritising migration concerns may involve sacrificing a lot of other political (human rights protection for both refugees and migrants) and geopolitical priorities. Second, origin and transit countries may simply not be able to fulfil what is asked of them as their capacity to govern their citizens may be relatively weak.

Third, the implementation of such agreements requires the creation of exceptional border regimes for asylum processing (with simplified processing), as happened in Greece in order for the EU-Turkey agreement to be in line with national law. Last and perhaps most important, such a policy often puts the burden of asylum seeking (and irregular migration management) on the weakest and poorest of states, including some countries that currently do not even have a rudimentary rule of law (such as Libya).

[Naasim Majidi](#) and [Sagaarika Dadu-Brown](#)

Samuel Hall

Without accounting for this holistic understanding of migrant smuggler dynamics in transit locations, most anti-smuggling policies appear to be narrow and one sided. Most do not factor in the abuse perpetrated by law enforcement officials. They also do not sufficiently take into account the nexus between migration and corruption. Mentioned in a number of interviews conducted with smuggled migrants in the Mediterranean, corruption in offices meant to support safe and legal migration channels were an important factor in driving people towards

smuggling.

Lastly, we've observed a trend in the feminisation of irregular migration – not only an increase in absolute terms of the movement of women using irregular means, but also in the agency and choices that women are increasingly making to use smugglers to reunite with family in countries like Canada. The fact that the Syrian crises have displaced families *en masse* means that a number of women are forced to choose between either living in transit countries like Turkey that offer little protection or use smugglers to reach Canada.

Their vulnerabilities and exposure to exploitation is only increased when anti-smuggling policies a) focus narrowly on criminalising the smuggler and the practise without a thorough understanding of the dynamics; and b) provide no checks on law enforcement officials.

Jill Alpes

VU Amsterdam

Anti-smuggling policies are based on the assumption that border brokers create risks for migrants. Aspiring migrants who give money to border brokers, however, understand migration to be intrinsically risky. To minimize those risks, aspiring migrants from Cameroon ask two questions: does a border broker have powerful *connections* (often with state agents); and does a border broker have the genuine *intention* to enable a border crossing?

Peter Tinti and Tuesday Reitano

Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime

Often times, such measures drive up the price of smuggling services, as smugglers factor increased risks and challenges into their pricing and pass

additional overhead and costs on to the consumer. In other contexts, anti-smuggling policies push small-time entrepreneurs out of the smuggling market. This provides the impetus for more sophisticated criminal actors to coordinate and coalesce around the profits to be made, or for other more established criminal organizations – who have the criminal expertise needed to avoid detection, bypass barriers, or bribe officials – to capture the market. Lastly, rather than deter migrants, anti-smuggling policies often do little more than force migrants and asylum seekers to take riskier, more dangerous routes to their destination, increasing their need for a smuggler, rather than reducing it.

The only way to sustainably counter migrant smuggling is to reduce demand for irregular migration through the creation of safe and legal routes. Given that such policies are unlikely to be pursued due to the current political climate, an alternative objective should be to make the smuggling market as minimally criminal and violent as possible. This requires avoiding policies that create volatility in the smuggling market, so as to allow some of the protection and insurance mechanisms that are often inherent in the smuggling industry – such as price guarantees and safety assurance – to develop. These allow for migrants to mitigate against the risks of mistreatment and exploitation.

Caitlin Blanchfield & Nina Valerie Kolowratnik

Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation

Anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies have far reaching impacts in borderlands communities. For the Tohono O'Odham tribe, which spans the US-Mexico border, border enforcement has led to increased surveillance and militarisation of their homeland and severely impeded cross-border traditional practices and the cross-border mobility of daily life.

The vehicle barrier along the Tohono O'Odham stretch of the international border is merely a fraction of the border's depth and of the security apparatus on the

nation. On the U.S. side, what follows the fence is the 60-foot 'Roosevelt Reservation', border patrol roads and officers on the ground, ground sensors, helicopters, checkpoints, and random stops and searches. All of this is within a 100 mile legal "border" zone, where border patrol has extra-constitutional authority.

With more and more border patrol officers on the ground and surveillance infrastructure increasingly pervasive, open space has become hostile in the borderlands. Infringing on the territorial rights of indigenous people, border enforcement practices are impeding Tohono O'Odham members' mobility within their own territory. Often the private interior is the only space outside of the watch of the border patrol.

With the increasing confinement to the individual home, personal movement is altered and traditional tribal practices impeded, thereby disrupting the tribe's cultural connection to the land. Frequent car stops and attempts to search homes are based on the assumption that locals are involved in criminal activity. This produces a culture of fear among the O'Odham and infringes on indigenous sovereignty by attempting to act as a law enforcement agency within the O'Odham Nation.

[Luigi Achilli](#)

European University Institute

Smuggling often involves overt forms of exploitation and is sometimes turned into what is commonly described as trafficking. However, one of the main conclusions of my research is that exploitation is, at times, consciously and willingly endorsed by its 'victims' as a means to enhance their own mobility.

In this sense, we need to move beyond the discussion of whether irregular migration is best defined in terms of trafficking or smuggling and examine how these phenomena are ultimately interconnected, insofar as they are different

means by which people move in situations where channels of legal entry are limited if not absent. Instead of lightly conflating human smuggling with human trafficking, we would better serve those on the move by addressing the overall consequences of stricter border regimes and the militarisation of border control.

Interested in more? Read all the answers of the Human Smugglers Roundtable II.

Featured image by Thomas Hawk (flickr, CC BY-NC 2.0)

The human smugglers roundtable is back!

Antje Missbach
April, 2017

HUMAN SMUGGLERS ROUNDTABLE II

While irregular migration is a global phenomenon, the mechanisms that allow for it to occur have received scant scholarly attention. Depictions of irregular migrants from war-torn and economically deprived regions 'flooding' refugee camps, riding atop of trains, and drowning in vast seas have effectively depicted contemporary migration flows as unprecedented, massive, and dangerous crises.

Portrayed as stretching thin the resources of nation-states and undermining their security, irregular migration has incited anti-immigrant sentiment, prompted voters to favour strict migration policies, and secured support for increasing border surveillance and controls. Within this context, irregular migration facilitated by human smuggling has consistently been depicted as a threat to global capitals worldwide.

Human smuggling has become almost part and parcel of the nation-state

security framework.

Official narratives of smuggling argue that complex, transnational criminal networks are responsible for the precarious and risky journeys migrants and asylum seekers embark upon – and for their economic, sexual, emotional and physical suffering and exploitation.

Such concerns over transnational crime are then used to justify immigration enforcement actions in which counter-smuggling measures appear as the most important mechanism to stop or reduce the influx of irregular migrants. In February of 2016, for example, Europol launched the [European Migrant Smuggling Centre](#) to "proactively support EU Member States in dismantling criminal networks involved in organizing migrant smuggling". Far from diminishing immigration flows, however, policy efforts have often resulted in an overabundance of short-sighted, piecemeal actions that have prioritised temporary solutions over the provision of sustainable and effective mechanisms of human protection and security.

Separating symptoms from causes

Human smugglers bear their share of responsibility for many of the tragedies we are currently witnessing in the Mediterranean Sea as well as elsewhere. However, our knowledge of irregular migration facilitation is often plagued with fragmented perspectives on the socio-cultural dynamics of the migratory journey, the facilitator-traveller relationship, and their community dimensions.

While it is true that research on irregular migration and its impacts is abundant, it suffers from a range of methodological and theoretical shortcomings concerning its facilitation.

First and foremost this research generally prioritises the perspectives of government or law enforcement entities eager to contain migratory flows. If often emphasises the most graphic and sensationalised incidents involving migrants,

refugees and asylum seekers unfortunate enough to be the target of threats, scams or violence in the context of their clandestine journeys. It is dependent on the mobilisation of graphic, overly simplistic messages on migration that prevent a better understanding of the phenomenon and the motives leading to migrant journeys.

In an effort to re-energise and advance a rather limited field of study, in April of 2016 Luigi Achilli (European University Institute) and Gabriella Sanchez (University of Texas at El Paso) organised a workshop to explore the facilitation of irregular migration. Held at the European University Institute in Florence on 5-6 April 2016, this event constituted the first collective attempt to provide grounded and much needed critical notions in the area of human smuggling scholarship. We have just finished our second workshop, "Critical Approaches to Irregular Migration Facilitation: Grounding the Theory and Praxis of Human Smuggling", which was held at the University of Texas in El Paso on 6-8 April 2017.

As we did in Florence, this event sought to foster the presentation and dissemination of empirically grounded smuggling research, a field often silenced by the onslaught of anecdotal evidence or technocratic-legalistic perspectives concerning the facilitation of irregular migration. Unlike the first workshop, which primarily challenged the state-dominated narratives of smuggling as forms of transnational organised crime, the 2017 workshop concentrated on the practices and empirics of human smuggling worldwide.

To bring this meeting to a wider audience Beyond Trafficking and Slavery and Allegra Lab have collaborated to produce a second online roundtable, which we are releasing today. Over the next few weeks these outlets will also publish a series of interviews conducted at the conference with its participants. We encourage you to take the time to the many individual responses of the roundtable using the graphic layout below, and to keep checking back in so as to not miss the interviews as they come out. We'll also be advertising new content on Beyond Slavery's Facebook and Twitter, so following those channels will also make it possible to keep up.

Both roundtable and interviews focus on the researchers' primary data collected through direct engagement with migrants and smugglers, and taken together this series debunks many of the myths around human smuggling and border control.

The words and works of our contributors compel us to rethink and reframe the very concept of smuggling, its actors, and its implications amid contemporary global migration control regimes.

Explore each panelist's answers or click on the question to see a consolidated selection. Items marked with an **are hosted by our co-producer [openDemocracy](#).**

Roundtable II: Responses by Jared P. Van Ramshorst

Jared P. Van Ramshorst
April, 2017

What are the intended/unintended consequences of anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies?

Anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies are intended to disrupt and deter cross-border smuggling and trafficking. While smuggling and trafficking practices differ in many regards, government policy rarely distinguishes between the two. In the U.S. and Mexico, such policies have taken a variety of forms and are increasingly directed toward restricting unauthorised migration from Central America.

For example, the U.S. has recently employed new surveillance technologies along the U.S.-Mexico border that make use of radar and infrared to detect unauthorised entry to the U.S. In Mexico, government officials have deployed hundreds of new immigration agents to its southern boundary with Guatemala alongside mobile checkpoints and inspection corridors. Ironically, these strategies have not only failed to eliminate smuggling and trafficking in North and Central America but have also contributed to their widespread and enduring use.

In particular, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies have complicated Central American migrants' efforts to reach the U.S. and Mexico. As migrants attempt to escape from violence and brutality in their countries of origin, they must now confront a number of obstacles created through anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies, such as those listed above.

Accordingly, many turn to clandestine means of travel to circumvent these restrictions, often relying on smugglers to guide them past immigration checkpoints and areas of intense surveillance. Thus, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies have not only failed to deter smuggling and trafficking, but have made these practices increasingly necessary and widespread.

Are border fortifications a useful or counterproductive response to mass movements of people?

From fences along the U.S.-Mexico border to the wall that separates Israel and

Palestine, border fortifications are a popular response to mass movements of people. Despite their prevalence in government policy and contemporary immigration debates, border fortifications are both ineffective and counterproductive.

For example, Operation Gatekeeper, a 1994 Clinton-era measure that vastly expanded border fortifications on the U.S.-Mexico boundary, did little to prevent or deter unauthorised migration to the U.S. Instead, the failed policy led to thousands of migrant deaths by shifting unauthorised entry to remote regions of the U.S.-Mexico border, such as the Sonoran Desert in Arizona and the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas.

Meanwhile, rates of unauthorised migration remained largely unchanged amidst a growing undocumented population in the U.S. The policy also led to an increasingly robust and organised industry of smuggling and trafficking along the U.S.-Mexico border, which has succeeded in facilitating unauthorised migration, despite border fortifications, for the past three decades.

In the wake of Donald Trump's presidency and his promise to "build the wall", border fortifications have reemerged as a popular response to recent migration streams. As past evidence indicates, further fortification of the U.S.-Mexico boundary will not only be ineffective but also counterproductive.

Roundtable II: Responses by David Danelo

David J. Danelo
April, 2017

What are the intended/unintended consequences of anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies?

Let's consider two continents. At the beginning of 2015, Europe prided itself on the freedom of movement that citizens of the Schengen Area enjoyed. By year's end, terrorist attacks and asylum seekers had fractured the borderless treaty into chaos. Like toppling dominoes one after another, European nations – most profoundly, the (not so) United Kingdom – have reasserted their sovereignty, declaring a loss of confidence in the European Union's political integrity. As the Schengen Area has shaken, a cascading series of political, economic, and cultural impacts have been felt throughout the region and the world.

Ten years ago, Europeans scoffed at American border controls, mocking the Department of Homeland Security as ineffective at best and draconian at worst. Yet, Europe's emerging security regime – symbolised by Brexit – preceded and presaged the horrific deportation policies of the Trump sdministration, which combine relentless surveillance with nationalist xenophobia. Combined, this venomous approach, typified by 'First Daughter' Ivanka Trump's conflation of smuggling with trafficking, will have a deep and enduring impact in the western

hemisphere that will, tragically, reverberate throughout the Global South.

Are border fortifications/restrictions a useful or counterproductive response to mass movements of people?

As Europe's border controls have tightened, and with little hope for peace in Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan, migration into Europe from Africa and the Middle East has decreased but still continues. As has happened previously in European history, these new borderlands have once again become places of cultural duality: regions of linguistic, ethnic, and religious fusion marked by fences, barbed wire, and signs warning the wrong people to keep out.

Hardening any international border invariably generates consequences that extend beyond the two countries establishing checkpoints or building walls. This will almost certainly happen during the Brexit negotiations, as the Ireland-United Kingdom land border becomes a flashpoint, potentially leading to renewed conflict or even open war between the regions.

In the western hemisphere, instead of satiating the demands of anti-immigrant partisans, two decades of border militarisation in the United States has only fueled calls for more borders. Dating back to the nineteenth-century Chinese Exclusion Act, restrictions have proved a failed approach to provincialism and can be added alongside slavery as blights on the American consciousness. Once a beacon of hope, the Statue of Liberty weeps for what the United States has become. The ugly transformation of borders, whether in Europe or North America, has hardened economic, cultural, and geopolitical landscapes, and will fuel uncertainty, recession, and discord for a generation to come.

→ **Back to the virtual roundtable**.