Roundtable II: Responses by Caitlin Blanchfield & Nina Valerie Kolowratnik

Caitlin Blanchfield
April, 2017

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

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. .

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

International border fortifications are hardly ever continuous; they are constructed at strategic stretches of the border in order to deviate migrants' movements, thereby creating more dangerous passages. On the US-Mexico border, the Southwest Border Strategy (started in the 1990s) directed substantial border enforcement resources to urban areas with the aim of "prevention through deterrence". This funnels migrants through remote, rugged desert as a means of stymying their flows. The result was not reduced migration, but rather a rising death toll and an even more elaborate smuggling system as people still pursued a better life elsewhere, now through a harsh and rural landscape.

As border patrol now increases enforcement efforts to these perceived deserted borderlands in an attempt to crack down on the migration patterns they have produced, they assume a homogeneity to cross-border movement and a one-directionality that ignores the active lives of local communities that span the border. This is the case in the Tohono O'Odham Nation, which has been afflicted both by the effects of illegal drug trafficking pushed through their lands, and now

by increased border fortification. By assuming that a mass of people move with the same motivations and in the same ways, fortifications infringe on rights to mobility and access to land.

→ Back to the virtual roundtable.

Roundtable II: Responses by Wendy Vogt

Wendy Vogt
April, 2017

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

It is widely estimated that hundreds of thousands of people are trafficked in Mexico each year. Since 2005, Mexico has passed a series of anti-trafficking laws at the national level; the most recent reform passed in 2014. Despite this legislation, very few people are ever arrested or convicted of trafficking. In Mexico, human traffickers operate with impunity.

An issue that emerged during my research with Central American migrants in transit is the ways in which anti-trafficking legislation is interpreted and implemented at the local level. Officials are quick to conflate human smuggling with human trafficking, but the reality is more complex; in Mexico smugglers have emerged as crucial sources of protection for migrants seeking to avoid organised criminal traffickers who control migrant routes. This issue is further complicated in a context where Mexican state officials are widely known to work in collusion with organised criminals. Smugglers become easy scapegoats.

Another area of concern is how trafficking laws are deployed tactically. For example, state officials are known to intimidate migrant shelter workers and human rights defenders by accusing them of human trafficking. Two of my closest interlocutors who worked at different shelters were publicly accused by local immigration officials of human trafficking with the specific crime of trafficking minors.

While the charges were eventually dropped, it led to unnecessary suspicion and doubt about the work of shelter workers. The case demonstrates how the ambiguity of such laws allows local agents to criminalise humanitarian practices. It is encouraging that Mexico has taken steps to recognise trafficking as a serious issue, but the problem will not be solved until corruption and impunity are addressed in real ways at the local level.

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

If the goal is to actually stop people from moving or crossing national territories, then no: border fortifications are not particularly useful. In the Central America-Mexico-US corridor, we know that fortifications can be very good at deterring people from particular routes by funneling them into more dangerous and clandestine routes, landscapes and industries. But they do not stop people.

This is not to say that borders are not useful or productive. On the contrary, borders, and bordering practices along interior migrant routes, are extremely

productive. In some cases, they produce imposing physical structures that disrupt natural ecosystems and historically rich corridors of economic and cultural exchange. In doing so, they produce profit – big profit – for a security-industrial complex with multiple vested stakeholders.

More securitisation in the form of surveillance, high-tech walls, guards, and detention facilities in turn creates demand for more clandestine industries to move people and drugs. These industries serve the insatiable appetites of (mostly) U.S. capitalists and illicit drug (and prison) industries, though associated violence is almost always constructed as a product of people of color.

Violence – real or perceived – thus becomes a very productive tool to instill fear of "the other". And fear … well fear is perhaps the most useful tactic of all as politicians and states seek power and legitimisation. So if the goal is to generate profit, fuel xenophobia and elect 'strongman' leaders, then yes, borders – as symbols and material realities – are quite useful.

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Roundtable II: Responses by Luigi Achilli

Luigi Achilli
April, 2017

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

From the perspective of media, border authorities, and public opinion, human smuggling is perceived as an exploitative business that, more often than not, spirals downward to forms of trafficking and coerced migration. In the context of the Syrian war, for example, Syrian asylum seekers are depicted by and large as victims exploited and deceived by a cartel of violent men who prey on their vulnerability.

Against this background, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies become the only effective measures in efforts to fight organised crime and rescue Syrian refugees. The findings of my research contradict this widely accepted belief. Over the course of my fieldwork, I came to recognise how human smuggling acquired social and moral significance among its actors. Bonds of solidarity and forms of cooperation between people characterised the interaction between facilitators and their customers.

> *Exploitation is, at times, consciously and willingly endorsed by its 'victims'.*

Of course, smuggling often involved overt forms of exploitation too and 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.

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

The so-called 'migrant crisis' in the Mediterranean has persuaded many political leaders all over Europe to consider the construction of a stronger wall north of Greece and the further militarisation of borders across the Western Balkan route as the only viable option in the fight against human smuggling and irregular migration. Could these be the real solution to the current crisis? I believe not.

Empirical evidence shows that the tightening of border control generally exposes migrants to greater dangers. Smugglers are well aware that they move on hazardous ground, and thus they use a variety of strategies – such as using more circuitous and dangerous routes or unsafe points of embarkation and disembarkation – to limit the chances of apprehension. My research and that of others also demonstrate that the militarisation of border control generates a protracted condition of illegality that ultimately leads irregular migrants to become smugglers themselves.

Smugglers often constitute the only available option for those migrants who flee a situation of immediate danger and distress. If the intended goal is the suppression of smuggling networks, security measures can be effective only if accompanied by other solutions. A truly effective answer to human smuggling would require the EU and its state members to concentrate on reducing 'demand' more than on curbing 'supply'.

Accordingly, the first decisive step toward a more durable – yet also more radical – solution for the current crisis would be to open new channels of legal entry and

the reinforcement of existing ones for asylum seekers, who often constitute the majority of people smuggled by sea.

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Roundtable II: Responses by Alexandra Ricard-Guay

Alexandra Ricard-Guay
April, 2017

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

Alexandra Ricard-Guay is a Research Associate at the European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. Her research focuses on trafficking, precarious migrants' rights and gender-based violence. In recent years, she has worked on the demand-side of trafficking in domestic work (DemadnAT project), as well as the nexus of trafficking/smuggling within the Central Mediterranean migration context. She holds a PhD in Social Work from

McGill University.

The migration context within the Central Mediterranean route lays bare not only the strong interconnections (and at times confusion) between trafficking and smuggling, but also the intersection of asylum flows and trafficking. Policies in each of these areas have implications, collateral or not, on the others.

Looking at the situation in Italy, two types of situations illustrate the challenges of the trafficking/smuggling nexus in gaining or being denied international protection. First, the phenomenon of trafficking involving Nigerian women and girls (far from new in Italy) has become a prime example of how smuggling and trafficking networks are superimposed on one another, and of how the asylum and irregular migration channels are being used by traffickers.

The IOM estimates extremely high numbers of potential trafficking victims in Nigeria, and being Nigerian and a woman (or girl) has become a key trafficking indicator. This has the effect of overshadowing other vulnerable groups and forms of trafficking, and poses the risk of labelling one group as being primarily a victim.

Further, there is a hierarchy of claims for international protection: refusing to self-identify as a victim of trafficking diminishes the potential of getting international protection. Second, a delicate tension arises in situations where migrants are accused of smuggling, because they have taken part in driving the boat for example. Such situations are becoming more frequent, and as investigative actions start in the search and rescue operations, they jeopardize fair access to international protection.

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Roundtable II: Responses by Peter Tinti & Tuesday Reitano

Peter Tinti
April, 2017

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

Migrant smugglers exist because there is demand for people to move irregularly or illegally across borders. Yet all too often, anti-smuggling policies only engage the 'supply' side of the equation. That is, policymakers often privilege law enforcement and border security measures, without addressing any of the underlying drivers of migration. The unintended consequences of such policies are manifold.

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.

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

In certain contexts, border fortifications and restrictions might block the mass movement of people temporarily, but such measures are ultimately counterproductive because they do nothing to address the underlying drivers of migration. In fact, such barriers, whether in the form of a wall or more restrictive visa policies, increase demand for smuggler services by rendering smugglers indispensable for migrants and asylum seekers.

At best, border fortifications and restrictions merely displace migrant flows, but they do not stop them, especially in cases of mass movements of people. At worst, they put migrants and asylum seekers in greater danger; pave new paths of exploitation and corruption along emerging and newly developed routes; provide the impetus for new migrant smuggling networks to form; incentivise the increased criminalisation of existing networks; and encourage established organised crime networks to enter into the migrant smuggling industry.

One of the greatest risks of a strategy focused on border controls and restricted

movement is that it creates stagnant populations behind new borders. Evidence in the Horn of Africa, North Africa and in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region shows that stagnant populations with a strong, unsatisfied desire to migrate can become easy recruiting grounds and visible potential profit centres for smugglers, traffickers, and other criminal groups.

Furthermore, they are more likely to create friction with local populations, inflame nationalist rhetoric, and prompt a highly-politicised response from governments in an effort to appease the local anxieties. All too often, these responses are heavily securitised – such as mass arrests and heavy-handed crack-downs – which again only serve to exacerbate the root causes of the problem in the first place.

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Roundtable II: Responses by Robert Barsky

Robert Barsky
April, 2017

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

Although aimed at reducing the suffering and risk incurred by migrants, forced and otherwise, most anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies reinforce the current trend of criminalising migration and militarising borders. Furthermore, and as dangerously, virtually all the current White House's statements on migration – as well as the various memoranda, statements and policy papers from the US Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) – emphasise the crime, danger, and violence of border crossing. This causes the complex reasons for flight to be swept up in a discourse of policing and violence that not only affects victims of smuggling and trafficking, but possible Convention refugees and undocumented persons as well.

The overt intentions of these policies is, according to the ICE website, to put an end to these practices.

> *"In its worst manifestation, human trafficking is akin to modern-day slavery. Victims pay to be illegally transported into the United States only to find themselves in the thrall of traffickers. They are forced into prostitution, involuntary labor and other forms of servitude to repay debts – often incurred during entry into the United States".*

Of smuggling, the site states that:

> *"Human smuggling is the importation of people into a country via the deliberate evasion of immigration laws. This includes bringing illegal aliens into a country, as well as the unlawful transportation and harboring of aliens already in a country illegally. Some smuggling situations may involve murder, rape and assault".*

The veracity of these statements can hardly be challenged, but neither definition tells the real story about those who are pushed from their community by violence, or who are pulled to the US by the quest for a different life or by the desire to

reunite with family members, or by the desire to experience movement through the Americas.

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

One of the standard lines used against undocumented people is that they steal jobs by queue jumping, and threaten the economies of the host country. However, a significant cadre of experts argue that by dramatically changing our approach to borders would could actually improve local economies. Moses *et al.* for example highlights that respected economists from major institutions now argue for open borders, and to consider his examples and sources suggests that the idea shouldn't be too easily dismissed.

> *Even the most skeptical economists realise that the economic costs of immigration are remarkably small.*

They review the work of three commentators from three strongly conservative organizations, namely: Phillipe Legrain, former journalist for *The Economist*; Lant Pritchett, an economist at the World Bank; and Jason Riley, an editorial board member at the *Wall Street Journal*. While their individual arguments vary, they include suggestions that: the free movement of people is just as beneficial as the free movement of goods and capital; societies from developed countries need to devise better mechanisms for supporting, integrating and assimilating immigrants from the developing world; and open borders are consistent with some basic values and traditions that underwrite countries such as the US.

Not all economists, of course, believe that the benefits of greater immigration outweigh the costs. But even the most skeptical economists realise that the economic costs of immigration – if they do, in fact, exist – are remarkably small and vary by level of aggregation. The costs associated with undocumented immigrants is probably even smaller, as these workers pay local and payroll taxes, but shy away from (or do not need) many of the public services that these taxes

support.

Few people would imagine that commentators associated with the *Wall Street Journal*, the World Bank or *The Economist* would agree on such a policy, but if we examine the current system of abuse and punishment more closely, it's surprising that more people don't. It's important to spread the word, because people all over the world are accustomed to seeing undocumented people doing fundamental tasks, yet don't speak out when these same people, especially workers, are subjected to 'crackdowns', arrest, and deportation. In other words, it's commonplace to think that when undocumented workers have finished building our stadium, painting our home, weeding our garden, or picking our crops, it's acceptable to unceremoniously make them disappear, forever. It's not.

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Roundtable II: Responses by Luca Rainieri

Luca Rainieri
April, 2017

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

Within fragile countries of the European neighbourhood and extended neighbourhood, anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking policies do not take place in a vacuum. They are often part of a broader set of policies through which external actors aim to shape local institutions in pursuit of several objectives. Border policies are thus part of a more comprehensive package of security measures and reforms, tasked with fighting a number of different threats.

Migration is locally seen as a resilience strategy, and trafficking generates profits unparalleled by legal activities – like in Niger for instance. The informal economy of migratory flows fosters corruption, but can also contribute to the hybrid stability of fragile regimes.

Constraining, containing and fighting human mobility, then, can be in contradiction with other security imperatives, such as clamping down on violent extremism and terrorism. In the long run, however, the criminalisation of local practices seen as legitimate and profitable – including "irregular" migration – can foster the entrenchment of corruption, which in turn is likely to undermine the stability of the state. Like the war on drugs, the war against irregular migration – with its the repeated failures – testifies to the hypocrisy of responses that often become part of the problem itself, yet are maintained due to ideological motives.

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Waiting for... EVENTS

Allegra
April, 2017

What do you know: its YET AGAIN time for events! This month our eye was caught by a delightful spread of events addressing transition, cities, waiting, forms of representations and power & aesthetics. Many have deadlines in early April – so get your abstracts in pronto!

And let's not forget the AAA Annual Meeting at the end of the year with its countless sessions, panels and roundtables. We like the following ones, to name but a few: Racialized Terror, Persistence and the Otherwise: histories and horizons of struggle and surveillance, or Urban Ethnographies Of Commoning or

the roundtable Recovering Anthropology's Voice: From Ethnographic Practice to Writing for the Public.

If you want your event to feature in our next events list or if want to write a short report, get in touch with our fabulous events assistant Aude at audef@allegralaboratory.net.

Conference: **Bodies in Transition — Power, Knowledge and Medical Anthropology**
5-7 July, Lisbon, Portugal

In 2017 the Biennial Conference of EASA Medical Anthropology Network will be hosted in Lisbon, Portugal, with the prospect of promoting a compact encounter with more plenaries and less parallel sessions. The purpose is to maximize the interweaving of our experiences and understandings across the different niches and orientations within medical anthropology and in exchange with neighboring fields; we hope that bringing back plenary sessions creates room for unpredicted synergies. Around 120 medical anthropologists from around the globe will meet at the University of Lisbon to debate current research and developments and discuss the field's contribution to gain a broader and deepened understanding of the conference's overarching topic.

We chose the ubiquitous theme of the **body,** qualified in its transitional, mobile, itinerant and dynamic character. We welcome panel and paper proposals addressing different understandings of **transition** – historical processes, colonial encounters, displacements, migrations, social mobility, cyborg and post-human

transformations, environmental variances and, last but not least, the multiple dynamics of embodiment – keeping in mind the centrality of power and knowledge as meaningful and critical axes of medical anthropology approaches to body and health. [more]

List of selected panels.

Panel 27: Engaging Ethnography and Global Health Disasters

The panel seeks to explore transitional knowledge(s) and power(s) by focusing on the role of ethnography in the investigation of the transnational socio-political, economic, and cultural processes informing global health disasters, their politics, understandings, and experiences. [more]

Deadline for submission of paper proposals: 1 April 2017

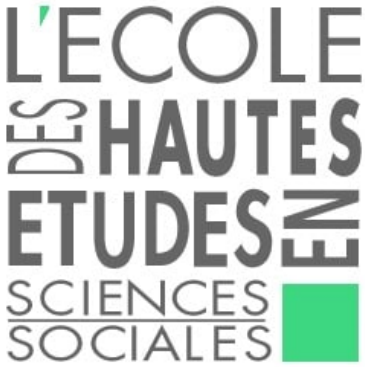
Workshop: **Anthropologies of Media and Mobility: Theorizing movement and circulations across entangled fields**

14-16 September, 2017, University of Cologne, Germany

This international workshop seeks to theorize the relationship between media and mobility. While mobility has been defined as movement ascribed with meaning, one might in similar fashion define media as meaning ascribed with movement. Interrogating the linkages between media and mobility can enable more thorough understandings of how various power structures produce, transform and reproduce social, material and discursive orders. People, devices, and data are increasingly on the move – movements that may transgress borders and boundaries, but which are also integral to the constitution and regulation of the barriers themselves. The movement of people triggers new imaginaries of

territories and social spaces, which circulate through media, questioning and forging new ties between people, signs and things. More broadly, the mobilisation of tangible and intangible things demands a reconceptualization of what a ‚thing' is, what constitutes the human, and what defines human collectivity. In such circumstances, reimagining circulations through the lens of media and mobility becomes an important step towards understanding current socio-cultural and political changes. While this lens has been applied broadly within anthropological research, its theoretical consequences merit further investigation and discussion. [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 3 April 2017



Journées d'Etudes: **Encounters and forms of representation in the age of globalisation: artistic and academic perspectives**

22-23 Juin 2017, EHESS, Paris, France

More then ever, the contemporary globalised world offers possibilities of encounters between individuals and things at a both material and immaterial level. The multiplication of these encounters leads individuals to question their personal, social, national, cultural, religious, sexual and political identities (to mention a few) and sense of community, labour and belonging to places and spaces. By constantly taking different forms, the amplification of possibilities of encounters between people and material and immaterial things leads individuals towards new experiences. Like browsers in shopping malls, the globalised individual expects to be easily aroused and instantly gratified through the

‘accumulation’ of human/non-human encounters. While guaranteeing a rapid, if temporary, sense of control and security these encounters are fragile, ephemeral and precarious in practice and yet enduring at a structural level. By the time the ‘form’ (or ‘category’) created through these encounters starts to circulate in the public sphere as a legitimate discourse, the question about the correspondence between the previous, “perennial” form of representation and the “precarious” dynamic of actual encounters also emerges. [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 15 April 2017

Workshop: **Waiting in Africa**

28-30 September 2017, Bayreuth, Germany

In this interdisciplinary workshop, we want to attend to the multifaceted nature of waiting from an Africanist perspective. We invite empirical or theoretical contributions from across the social sciences and cultural studies to explore practices, experiences, affects, contexts and consequences of waiting in Africa and among African diasporas. By zeroing in on the different ways in which people engage with temporalities of waiting, be it through modes of expectancy, patience, perseverance, creed, anxiety, powerlessness or indifference, we wish to strengthen the theoretical purchase that the perspective on waiting offers. Set against the overarching topic of *waiting in Africa*, the primary aim of the workshop is to provide a platform for discussing different approaches towards waiting as both a descriptive and an analytical category, as well as for reflecting on the methodological challenges implied in the study of situations of waiting. [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 30 April 2017

Workshop: **Deservingness – power, morality and inequality in contemporary Europe and beyond**

27-28 October 2017, University of Vienna, Austria

The dynamics of present-day inequalities are often manifested as a moral debate and even panic. People and groups create, maintain and transform arrangements of power through processes of justifying inequalities as either substantive features of groups or in terms of the neoliberal ideology of self-responsibility. The workshop explores how this is done through narratives, practices, or institutional arrangements, as well as the ideological, socio-economic and political legacies they are embedded in. [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 15 May 2017

Call for Chapters: **Commoning the City: Comparative Perspectives from Istanbul and Beyond** (Edited Volume)

This edited volume has its roots in Spaces in Common, a seminar series realized in Istanbul in the Spring of 2016, where a group of academics and activists were invited to think together about forms of urban living created through acts of commoning –spaces imagined and lived as urban commons, belonging to no one and everyone.

The proposed collection of papers similarly aims to reflect upon urban inhabitants' commoning practices that produce and reproduce life in the city for the sake of cultivating a new ethos to sustain livelihoods and affirm communal instincts beyond motivations of profit, competition, and wealth spared for individual well-being at the expense of others. These practices develop a culture of commoning that helps imagine a city marked by alternative socio-spatial relations and practices. Such imagery is possible only with active and creative urban inhabitants immersed in cultures of commoning through their quotidian practices, be they work, reproductive labor, or leisure and festivity. It is these practices that make our spaces in common despite (and in the midst of) capitalist social relationships. We embrace the concept of urban commons as it allows us to think beyond the public-private and state-market dichotomies that are the building blocks of capitalist social formations. [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 1 May 2017

Call for Submissions: **Writing and Objects, Objects in Writing** (*The Unfamiliar*, Vol 7 (1))

The study of objects has always been central to anthropology. Objects are used in various transactions, household routines, rituals, mortuary rites, and weddings, and can take many shapes and meaning. This issue of the Unfamiliar seeks to explore the relationship between objects and writing, and to illustrate how objects play a significant role in peoples' lives. We ask: How are places, people, and relationships entwined with objects, and how do we write about them? Can we write about these, without writing about objects? What do objects tell us and how are they intrinsic to anthropological writing? How do we talk about people, and what is the role of objects in understanding and writing culture? From gifts to

commodities, art objects to magical artefacts; from clothing to tools, technology to infrastructure; what makes objects significant, and how do they take shape and materialise in our writing? We invite papers exploring these questions, interested in, but not limited to, ethnographic writing, material culture, heritage, science and technology studies, anthropology of art, economic anthropology, and development studies. [more]

Deadline for submissions: 28 May 2017

Humanitarian Carnival – Julie Billaud Discusses her Book with Heath Cabot

Julie Billaud
April, 2017

Julie Billaud's first monograph, entitled « Kabul Carnival: Gender Politics in Postwar Afghanistan», came out in 2015 with the University of Pennsylvania Press, in its series The Ethnography of Political Violence, edited by Tobias Kelly. The book is an ethnographic exploration of gender politics, humanitarianism and legal reform in "postwar reconstruction" Afghanistan. Our "Allie" Heath Cabot sat down with her for a (virtual) discussion on her book

Heath: Your book is in part an ethnography of how women (as both a category and a set of gendered performances, tactics, and ideologies) become a battleground, so to speak, for the making of contemporary Afghanistan. Did you set out to work on issues of gender? How did you decide to focus on Afghanistan?

Julie: Gender issues had been on my mind for a long time when I decided to embark on a PhD in a anthropology program. In fact, I discovered anthropology through a class on 'Gender Discourses and Relations in Europe' taught by Jane Cowan at the University of Sussex. I found the course so fascinating that I chose to write my MA thesis on a Paris-based group of women activists for peace in the Middle East called 'Women in Black'. In this piece of work, like in my work on Afghanistan, I was interested in observing the various ways in which women become 'visible' in public, that is to say: how women become politically legitimate subjects with a voice of their own. Women in Black gathered once a week on a square in Paris' city center, dressed in black, holding posters with slogans against the occupation of Palestine. The setting they had created to stage their protest was inspired from the Madres of the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires, who organized weekly marches to denounce the disappearance of their sons during the Dirty War of the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. Like them, Women in Black remained silent, their presence on the square acting as a public reminder of the conflict and of their loss (symbolic or real) as mothers of Israeli and Palestinian children. Their performance was of course consciously gendered: it tapped into nationalist representations of women as 'mourning mothers' but also challenged such representations by bringing women in a space traditionally reserved to men: the square, the ultimate political arena.

With my PhD, I redirected my focus on Afghanistan, a country where I spent a year as a humanitarian worker short after the intervention of the coalition forces in 2003-2004.

> *Because the intervention had been justified by the necessity to put an end to 'gender apartheid' – as some human rights defenders called it – I thought it would be useful to scrutinize what this externally imposed 'liberation' would concretely mean in practice.*

The women I met during my first journey in Afghanistan had little in common with the ones depicted by the international press. Far from being the passive victims of religious fundamentalism, I found politically engaged and extremely resourceful women who had things to say about the future of their country. My book is a modest attempt at retrieving these voices and at providing a more accurate representation of the complex reality of Afghan women's lives under foreign occupation.

Heath: You make wonderful use of Bakhtin's notion of the "carnivalesque" from *Rabelais and his World* to set the stage for the series of performances that constitute reconstruction-period Afghanistan. Can you tell us more why this metaphor is so important for the book? What happens when the "carnival" becomes gendered?

Julie: The idea I am trying to articulate with the 'carnival' metaphor is that the current agenda for the 'empowerment of women' is part of a broader humanitarian theater that serves to promote an impression of normalization for Western audiences while hiding the continuity of violence and injustice at the local level. Indeed, the reconstruction of Afghanistan has been presented as a return to normality after long years of war and authoritarian rule. This discourse has fed the illusion of an absolute reversal from an old order characterised by brutality to a new one characterised by 'democracy', 'the rule of law' and 'gender justice'. However, a closer look at the inconsistencies, paradoxes, and ambiguities that have accompanied the 'reconstruction', especially in the sensitive arena of gender, reveals that this rhetoric of reversals is anchored in a long history of foreign-led 'modernization' programs disconnected from the social reality of the people who are supposed to benefit from it.

Indeed, the ethnographic material I present in my book demonstrates that the international community's concern with the visibility of women in public has ultimately created tensions and constrained women's capacity to find a culturally legitimate voice. The recent lynching in Kabul of a young woman called Farkhunda falsely accused of burning the Koran has to be understood in this very

tensed context marked by deep inequality and the emergence of lumpen youth in thrall of radical Islam and violence. While the 'reconstruction' has opened new possibilities for women and created new imaginaries pertaining to their role in society, the ideological framework (i.e liberal notions of equality and human rights etc.) on which it is grounded together with the strong military presence of foreign troops, have triggered moral panics around 'identity'. Pressurized by their community to remain faithful to their 'culture', 'religion' and 'tradition' on the one hand, and encouraged to access the public and become 'visible' by global forces on the other hand, women stand on the frontline of a symbolic battle between competing notions of 'honour', 'modernity', 'democracy', and the role of Islam in society.

> *Left with little choice but to adapt and find alternative ways to preserve some degree of autonomy, women too have had to engage in carnivalesque performances. Here I am referring to the more positive aspect of Bakhtin's notion of carnival, i.e its regenerative potential, its liberating power.*

Heath: As a reader, I had some glimpses into your field experience, both in terms of issues of personal safety, emotional intensity, and the range of spaces and social worlds that you navigated. But you are refreshingly nonchalant about this – you don't give us a picture of the ethnographer as hero/warrior, though you easily could. How did you manage doing ethnographic work in a space that is in conflict/post-conflict? What does doing fieldwork in such fraught socio-political spaces offer for the practice of ethnography more broadly?

Julie: Afghanistan was not totally unknown to me when I started my fieldwork, even though the situation had changed quite dramatically between my first journey in 2003-2004 and my second in 2007. If security conditions had worsened, I returned to a country where I had a few friends and contacts on which I could rely. I also learnt the language, which was a key element for building trust with the people I met. Finally, I secured a position in a company

specialized in social marketing. I worked there for a few months until I made enough contacts in the circles I was interested in studying to continue fieldwork on my own.

Since 9/11, many places on the planet have become the target of Western military interventions. This interference is often justified by the need to 'fight terrorism', 'implement the rule of law' and 'bring democracy'.

> *Like in earlier colonial enterprises, some (very problematic) 'anthropological knowledge' about the 'culture of others' is mobilized to develop the moral grammar legitimizing these occupations.*

In the case of Afghanistan, 'local' culture is often described (in the international press as well as in NGOs and IOs' reports) in fixed and essentialist terms, as traditional, conservative, responsible for all the ills of society. It seems to me that it is the role of anthropologists to fight such stereotypes and bring back politics and history at the center of our analysis.

Heath: The first half of your book is structured around the notion of "phantom" state building, regarding colonial/ post-colonial/ humanitarian approaches to constructing the Afghan state and nation. Can you tell us more about what you mean by "phantom" in this context?

Julie: The first part of the book focuses on the historical and political dimensions of the women's question within the complex process of nation-building in Afghanistan. I provide a historical overview of the fashioning of the Afghan nation through the lenses of gender and I locate the current project of 'nation-state building' in the continuity of a series of 'failed' modernization attempts conducted in the early 30s, the 60s-70s and during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan.

> *What I am trying to demonstrate is that from the outset the Afghan state has remained a figment of the imagination, which in the reconstruction limbo mostly manifests itself through the use of violence, symbolic or real.*

Indeed, if state infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, courts, police stations etc. have been rebuilt and partially staffed, the traditional Weberian functions of the state are shared with a myriad of other actors, such as NGOs, UN agencies, the World Bank, private companies, and local militias and narco-traffickers. Most state infrastructures remain dysfunctional for lack of trained personnel, financial resources and widespread corruption. For these reasons, the state cannot be analyzed in terms of 'apparatus' or 'structures' but is better described as a ghostly entity whose boundaries remain elusive, porous and mobile.

However, if the 'state' is difficult to grasp, it remains a powerful object of fantasies for both representatives of the international community and ordinary Afghans. Even though Afghans tend to be cynical in their relation to the state, the discourses that have accompanied the reconstruction regarding the state's duties (especially concepts such as the 'rule of law' or 'gender justice') have increased Afghans' expectations towards the state. This tension is a distinctive feature of the 'postcolony', which I am trying to unpack in the book, using various ethnographic examples collected in the Afghan judiciary and in the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Heath: You have numerous important interventions that you make in the book. But the two overarching arguments I take away pertain to how we conceive of culture and agency, as you intercede in longstanding debates in anthropology AND in development discourse around these ideas and practices. Would you be willing to tell readers a bit about how you have sought to reframe and rearticulate these highly charged terms?

Julie: Modernisation theory originally considered 'culture' as a barrier to development. Early modernizers shared the view that for a society to develop, social engineering should go hand in hand with technological innovation. Legal reform, especially in family matters, was therefore a central element of development programs carried out in the South in the 1950s up until the 1980s. It is interesting to note that if the ideological framework that guides the reconstruction is slightly different, it is still possible to draw parallels with

modernization projects that took place under the previous regimes, notably the one of Zaher Shah and the communist regime that came later on. All of these 'modernization' attempts were marked by a strong emphasis on gender issues. In Afghanistan, like in Turkey under Ataturk or in Syria, Iran and Iraq during the same period, the construction of the modern state implied the reshaping of gender relations through state-led programs for the emancipation of women. To a great extent, the current focus on 'women' mirrors these earlier developments.

> *What one often hears in development circles and among the political elite is that the main barriers to the emancipation of women are to be found in 'Afghan culture, customs and traditions'. I think these explanations are problematic because they take for granted the notion of 'culture' as if it could be easily pinpointed, as if 'culture' never changed or was never discussed.*

It seems to me more accurate to consider 'culture' as a battleground or as a political field (in Bourdieu's sense) where different actors, with different subject positions and agendas struggle to impose their own version of 'culture'. Such a conception of 'culture' allows us to envision room for agency, especially for women who, in the current context, cannot express horizons of desires without being considered as 'traitors sold to foreign forces'. For this reason, their 'resistance' to both Western interventions and to local politics needs to be articulated within a legitimate and audible cultural frame. In the book, I show examples of these dynamics in various contexts and settings in order to deconstruct the widespread idea that 'agency' necessitates clear 'break ups' with 'culture' or 'tradition', as mainstream Western feminists tend to believe.

Heath: The book includes numerous discussions of Afghanistan's fraught relationship with highly westernized notions of "modernity," both currently and historically, during various periods of "reform." In the second half of the book, however, you show how Afghan women themselves practice and aspire to what Lisa Rofel might call "other modernities." How does "the modern" function in contemporary

Afghanistan? Do you see any of the alternate modernities that you portray gaining traction in wider public spheres (both in Afghanistan and globally)?

Julie: In Afghanistan like anywhere else for that matter, there is no consensus on what constitutes the 'modern'. However, the collective memory has kept traces of the 'modernization' programs carried out by the various governments and their Western supporters from the 1920s onwards. To a great extent, the type of society the Taliban strove to establish was a direct reaction to such programs, from which a large part of the mainly rural population had been excluded. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the chaos that reigned after their departure was interpreted as a sign of the political elite's corruption. Only a return to a strict version of Islam, they believed, could bring law and order back to the country. This meant, in practice, implementing policies diametrically opposed to the ones implemented by the previous regimes: When the communists had encouraged women to join the workforce, unveil and take part in politics, the Taliban locked them in their homes, forced them to veil entirely and to remain silent in public.

Because women's subjectivity has been shaped by these historical developments, as well as by their experience of displacement and exile during the war, their interpretation of and aspirations to modernity is fundamentally complex and fragmented. Like in the case of China Rofel describes, Afghan women do not simply embrace Western cultural models. Their practices reveal that local forms of meaning are enmeshed in increasingly larger spheres of class, ideology, nation, and global capital which provide a fertile ground for 'other modernities' to emerge.

> *Some of my readers will perhaps find it surprising that I spend so much time discussing women's beauty practices in Kabul but to me, the amount of time, money and thoughts women spend on bodily matters and the intense public controversies around the question of what to wear, are revealing of the continuing colonial anxieties around 'modernity' that the occupation*

contributes to perpetuate.

Heath: A more specific and personalized question: The question of ethnicity I found particularly fascinating, as in my own fieldwork in Greece I had contact with numerous Afghans from multiple ethnic backgrounds – but in particular, Hazara men and women who, like some of the women you discuss in your book, had been in exile in Iran. You suggest, however, that aspects of "culture" and "tradition" often linked to ethnicity are less important in distinguishing different groups of women than the experience of exile, which made Hazara women more willing and perhaps able to connect with other foreigners such as yourself (and perhaps ultimately in Europe). How does ethnicity figure (or not) in social hierarchies and divisions among women in Afghanistan?

Julie: I was sometimes criticized for not treating the ethnic issue with sufficient rigor in my work. This is perhaps because, as you rightly highlight, the experience of migration during the successive Afghan wars has deeply transformed Afghan's subjective experience of ethnicity. Many Afghans have discovered their 'Afghanness' abroad and ironically, it is when returning 'home' that they had to face stigmatisation as 'foreigners'. Hazaras, in particular, who were (and to a large extent still are) considered the 'underdogs' of society (a bit like the Dalits in India), had to endure this extra layer of discrimination when returning from long years of exile in Iran. In the girls' dormitory where I boarded for 4 months, Hazara returnees were able to share rooms with girls from other ethnic groups, based on this similar experience of exclusion.

This is another evidence of the relative influence of 'culture' and 'ethnicity' in the reproduction of social hierarchies in Afghanistan.

Listen to an interview with Julie Billaud on New Books in South Asian Studies:

http://files.newbooksnetwork.com/southasia/048southasiabillaud.mp3

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The gendered realities of #displacement: Syrian women in Istanbul

Helen Mackreath
April, 2017

Syrian women are existing between different layers of expectation. In Istanbul power manifests itself in different spaces. It is in the house, on the street, between other Syrian women, between other Turkish women, between men of all nationalities, between Syrian social convention, between Turkish social convention, between different religious conventions, between the realities of displacement. In winter, when the fires burn in makeshift lead stoves behind market stalls, it is the women and children who are still there on their cardboard squares. In summer the heat entices out an increasing scrabble of bodies on the streets, dry skinned and empty palmed.

> *There is no universal experience of displacement, just as there is no universal "woman's experience"[i], but displacement is gendered in the way it forces women to navigate spectrums of power.*

And while gender "captures only one axis of women's interests and identifications (the relevant axes include, variously, class, race, ethnicity, religion, kin and other status differentials such as age)"[ii], it is their specific identities as women which are often being directly targeted by policies, directly or indirectly administered. In many instances women have a more intimate and direct relationship with governing authorities through their identities as mothers to children who need education, vaccinations, birth certificates, milk; through their legal redress for issues of sexual harassment, divorce proceedings, labour exploitation; and often, although not always, by being the ones to seek out information – furniture to buy, drugs to administer, language classes to enroll in. In this way they may be seen as more vulnerable to processes of Foucault's notion of biopower, broadly understood as "a mode of power concerned with the maintenance and control of bodies and persons, the production and regulation of persons and populations."[iii]

In Istanbul displaced Kurds, Syrian, Iraqi, Iranian, Afghan and many other refugees and migrants make and remake their lives. I spent some months in the spring and summer of 2016 talking to Syrian women living across Zeytinburnu, Esenler, Okmeydanı, Tarlabaşı, Fatih, Balat districts of the city about displacement, trying to unpick some of its manifestations and permutations, and what follows are only a few tentative observations taken from those encounters.

> *The way women navigate new responsibilities, burdens, layered identities might be a good starting point from which to understand 'ways in which norms are lived and inhabited, aspired to, reached for, and consummated'.[iv]*

Taking Mahmood's framing of the concept of agency, in which she encourages us to recognise different manifestations of agency, which may equally appear as forms of passivity and docility,[v] enables observing the multiplicity of responses of women to displacement rather than locking them within a dualistic, and intrinsically antagonistic, framework of subordination and subversion.

Addressing the challenges confronting women in displacement should not fall into

the moral narrative trap of ‘deserving’ women and their ‘undeserving’ male counterparts,[vi] but rather the focus here will be highlighting specific forms of power which impact women, while recognising that particular and damaging burdens are also placed on men and that the new roles and realities which both are experiencing are intrinsically related. Segmentation and fragmentation across culture, class, and faith are imposing additional barriers—women are not necessarily all in it together. Hierarchies and inequalities are being imposed in how women access information, find confidence, cope with trauma. This is often associated with class factors—those women with money can mobilise more resources and women with different class status have different struggles—but it is also linked to other things, i.e. support networks, religion, age, personality, location. These social hierarchies are reflections of existing stratifications of society in Syria, or differentiated senses of entitlement—in Fatih, one Syrian women’s group rejected the price of labour for knitting offered by another Syrian women’s group. The aim was collective pooling of resources, labour and distribution, the result was division and judgment.

Syrian women are arriving in an already entrenched system of patriarchy in Turkey. Patriarchy is also embedded in the responses of Turkish women to their Syrian ‘guests’—the practice of Syrian women marrying Turkish men, often as a coping mechanism, turns Turkish women against them, not their husbands.[vii] Second wives, often the identity which Syrian women are forced to assume, are regarded as prostitutes by the rest of society. This is a basic survival strategy, out of economic necessity, and to gain security, a home, access to a social network. According to official data from the Turkish Statistics Institute (TUIK), almost 3,600 Syrian women married Turkish men in 2015. Feminist groups in Istanbul have not sought to increase their capacity to respond to the issues of Syrian women—according to one of the few collectives which *is* dealing with Syrians, most feminist groups believe the Syrian issue is not for them to deal with, but for other NGOs. They are continuing to focus instead on the many other vulnerable women—Turkish or other migrants—in the city, who have also often been ignored. Some of these groups are now starting to realise that Syrian Gender Based

Violence is important, but they don't know how to get funds for their work.

> *Issues specific to women are still not embedded components of refugee response; women are not central in efforts for going forward.*

'The humanitarian system has not seen the point of GBV', says Özgül Kaptan, director of KADAV (Women's Solidarity Foundation), 'it took almost three years for us to get funding from the EU'. In many cases the rights which Syrian women have on paper are not available in practice. Many marriages are not registered officially since they require the Syrian party to have a residence permit in Turkey – if women want to take their husbands to court over abuse, neglect, divorce, they can't legally prove they're married. If a woman is a second wife, her baby is registered under the name of the legal wife – she loses all rights to her child, resulting in the loss of their identity, rights, future. The sexual harassment of Syrian women, alongside Turkish women and other vulnerable minority groups, has been well documented. Much of this sexual harassment is insidious. One director of a feminist collective related how the centre had received telephone calls from Turkish men asking if there were vulnerable women who needed their shelter, a pretext for them marrying them. Another man in Istanbul, the '*bakkal*', or cornershop man, of the street, was calling on behalf of an old neighbour – he'd made a list of women's organisations and was calling them all up asking for women. He'd already tried a Syrian woman, he said, but wasn't happy with her, and was now looking for a Turkish woman.

> *Women are being targeted in specific realms of their lives as mothers.*

While women should not be reduced to this role alone[viii], the lack of access to family planning services constitutes another act of violence against them, forcing continuous motherhood on their, often traumatised, bodies and taking away ownership of their reproductive rights. Two examples can be elaborated on here to demonstrate this. The first is their being denied, in parts of Turkey, the distribution of milk which is being provided for babies of Turkish mothers. The

second is in the precarious national legality, for some, over the children they give birth to, with increasing numbers of babies running the risk of statelessness owing to the lack of legal rights afforded to their mothers.

In Izmir, the 'Süt Kuzusu'[ix] (Milk Lamb) campaign has been running since 2005, in which Izmir Metropolitan Municipality distributes milk to families with children between the ages of 0-5 years. By 2008 the amount of milk being distributed had increased to four litres every two-weeks for each child. Families who want to benefit from the campaign must apply to the municipality with their family registration document and identity cards. However, Syrians are not able to benefit from it since they do not have Turkish citizenship, despite the large numbers of Syrian children in desperate need of milk and the large quantity of milk which is being left surplus. One female member of an NGO involved with Syrians in the city described encouraging Turkish women to give their surplus milk to needy Syrian women, but was prevented from doing so by the driver of one of the milk lorries, who told her that such an act was 'forbidden', and the milk was only for the consumption of the 'given' child.

The explicit denial of milk to Syrian mothers holds symbolic importance if milk is understood as a 'female good'[x]. Milk is one of the most basic units of the capitalist political economy[xi], a symbol of welfare, and penetrative of female identity and sexuality. Its denial constitutes violence against women on two fronts – firstly as providers to their children, and secondly as potential participants in the Turkish welfare economy, equal to Turkish women not along lines of citizenship but along lines of common identifiers as women and mothers. The particular example of Turkish women being commanded not to share their milk with Syrian women by a Turkish man also denies a common platform of exchange, and represents an explicit patriarchal intrusion into matters of female solidarity, child-rearing and control over intimate female private decisions and spaces.

> *An increasing number of babies born to Syrian parents in Turkey are at risk of being stateless owing to legal discrimination against their mothers.*

According to the current Syrian Nationality Law, in Legislative Decree 276/1969, Syrian women cannot pass on their nationality to their children.[xii] In some circumstances for Syrian mothers giving birth to Syrians in Turkey, the father might not be recorded on the birth report if he is not present and the mother does not have their marriage, or his birth, certificate, or his name may be misspelled in transliteration (Arabic names are written in the Turkish alphabet, which may cause confusion later if names are translated back into Arabic and do not match the father's name).[xiii] As a result, without the father's name on the birth report, the child may not be able to prove a right to Syrian citizenship. This is one of many other threats to gaining citizenship, including parents not being registered, or under-aged Syrian women marrying, or Syrian women entering a polygamous marriage with, a Turkish man in which the marriage is not legally registered.

> *For Syrian women in displacement, with little control over their reproductive rights, they may also be in a position of losing control of the identity and future rights of their child.*

On the one hand they have the responsibility, often against their choice, of being the procreators of the future Syrian nation, despite permanent uncertainty over their status within it and its future trajectory; on the other hand they have been made powerless and reduced to their reproductive function. Another form of aggression for mothers, sometimes quite literal, is in the burden or bringing up children who are desensitised, and sometimes even attracted, to violence. This may be due to violence practiced against them by fathers and mothers at home; the experience of violence in Syria; the constant exposure to it on television, online and other platforms of communication where violence is the dominant theme; and the frequency of violence in conversations between adults, which the children are more likely to overhear owing to restricted living spaces. Such intimate relationships with violence, practiced within the private and public spheres, adds another emotional burden to the responsibility of child-raising.

> *But if Mahmood's concept of agency is taken as a frame, in which she draws on*

> *Foucault's subject, who is intrinsically tied within the historically and culturally specific disciplines[xiv], then there are multiple ways in which Syrian women are enacting agency.*

The Syrian women who took her Turkish husband to court to provide the child care he was neglecting, the young woman who mobilised surveys of conditions in the camps around the border, the women setting up their own businesses or community centres.

In Okmeydanı district, Syrian women gather at the meeting of the Turkish Okmeydanı Association, heavily clad even in the heat of the sun and even though it is five pm during Ramadan. Okmeydanı does not have a particularly large number of Syrians – around 500 in total. There are many other ostracised groups here, notably a large Alevi population, who are navigating their own identities and belongings. Graffiti everywhere reflects the left-leaning politics of the area; boys play football in Barcelona FC stripes down along the alleys; there is an altercation between three rubbish collectors; men yelling to advertise their wares. A police 'scorpion' van waits on the corner – there is a heavy state security presence. It is all women at the Association on this day – the mothers who bring children to browse the donated clothes, the women who come asking for an appointment at the hospital, the director of the Okmeydanı Association, who sits with dirty blonde hair puffing smoke into the air. It is an older woman, a little distressed, who comes in to find a hospital appointment. The women at the meeting are practising the art of presence[xv], coming clutching notebooks in hand, ready to take note, to document and think and contribute to the changes happening in 'their' community. It is their community – they live there, they socialise there, they have their problems there. Their bodies are occupying that space and they are active social actors in shaping it. But whether or not it *is* their community is a delicate matter. Rather, their community exists within the existing space, careful not to brush edges with it.

A group of Syrian woman has set up a women's centre in front of Fatih Mosque to

provide a space to meet and socialise. This part of town, traditionally more conservative, has attracted the largest concentration of Syrians. The Syrian director of the women's centre arrives fresh from another meeting to discuss the changing circumstances of Syrian women in Turkey. She speaks in a businesslike manner, while doodling octagonal domed roofs on a tissue. 'Syrian women are still in shock. We don't know what will happen when women wake up from this dream'. She shoots off a list of figures – more than 100,000 Syrian women are the sole providers for their families, more than 56 percent of the Syrian women in Istanbul are educated to university level and 28 percent to high school level. Her statements are impossible to verify but she speaks with an air of unquestioned authority. The collective response of the womens' centre to displacement is to organise twice weekly coffee mornings and sessions with a University lecturer on the other side of the Bosporus about 'success'. They also host 'strength response' sessions for women – how to say 'no', when and why, to protect from harassment. These same women are the ones who use the 'Girls in Istanbul' (صبايا اسطنبول) facebook group – a forum not only for exchanging furniture, sharing advice on schools for children, or where to find a good doctor but also where older women seek out potential brides for their sons. All of their normal physical social activities, relationships, transactions, matchmaking are being transferred into a virtual sphere.

The question Mahmood asks—how do we conceive of individual freedom in a context where the distinction between the subject's own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be easily presumed, and where submission to certain forms of authority is a condition for achieving the subject's potentiality?[xvi]— is relevant for trying to unpick the manifestations of gender relations in periods of displacement. The specific challenges facing women in displacement, and the various related reconfigurations which displacement forces, also generates corresponding spaces for specific performances, and enactment of freedoms, which may shed light on what sort of political communities are being formed.

The particular strategies which women are employing and the spaces of

> *freedoms which they create, which are often very local, contingent, and often impossible to predict, also reflect the constellation of power structures which they are existing in, contesting or reproducing.*

* *Şevin Gülfer Sağniç contributed towards some of the research used in this article.*

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K'aissina! Father, Son, Taboos:

Life-Lessons from Ethiopia

Felix Girke
April, 2017

The Kara of southern Ethiopia are a small population of horti-pastoralists among whom I have worked since 2003. Over the years, I collected in particularly cherished sections of my notebooks a number of taboos specific to Kara. Some were rather sensible, some were outlandish even by local sensibilities. Consider the constraints on the sheep: sheep are prohibited from scaling trees or huts. Sheep are prohibited from entering a dug-out canoe. Sheep may not enter a hut if there is merely a single woman in there. The list is not exhaustive; I am sure, with some energetic prompting I would have been able to elicit more things that sheep may not do.

When I call this “taboos”, I of course translate. These items were all explicitly declared k’aiss, a word that with its hissing pronunciation carried the sense of prohibition well – just like the German “heiß!”, a k’aiss! thrown your way, or k’aissina [it is taboo] will usually make you pause and consider. The poor sheep actually have to pay with their lives for such transgressions. At the same time, goats may do all these things, and nobody bats an eye.

Some more examples for taboos:

- One may not split open animal bones at night.
- One may not buy anything connected with fertility (seeds, female animals) with either money that was carried by a donkey, or with money that was earned by selling things carried by a donkey.
- Members of one clan may not eat liver.
- Members of another clan may not eat kidney.
- Sorcerers may not eat the heads of animals.
- A great number of taboos regulate female fertility, with a chilling strictness at times.

> *Taboos often tie into rituals, but as the sheep so well illustrate, even rather profane matters have invited dramatic proscriptions.*

This was never a particularly serious focus of my work, and already in the field it was clear that it was best to resist the list, and simply look at the k’aiss of Kara as they came to matter in interaction. As indicated above, this rather clearly revealed that not all taboos had the same ontological status. Some seemed to be little more than quaint (and even anachronistic) objections that individual Kara might raise to get a chuckle out of an audience; others still served as uncomfortable reminders of unseen powers, broken only with strong misgivings and distinct unease. Some were expressed as explicit rules, some existed as vague tenets focusing on items, animals, practices, or something else generally considered polluting and problematic.

To illustrate the reflexivity inherent in the spectrum of k'aiss practices, a more vivid example:
My host brother Haila once prepared balls of chewing tobacco required for a specific ritual. This was about his first child and the clan, and thus had some public visibility. As he sat and formed the moist mass, a dog walked by and inadvertently stepped on the pile of already finished tobacco lumps. Dogs are not particularly wholesome animals in Kara. If not quite as polluting as donkeys, they are usually considered animated objects of questionable value at best; kaski! [dog] is a favored insult. At that very moment, I could see how Haila hesitated. What to do now? Had anybody even noticed the dog stepping on his tobacco? Was there even an explicit taboo on this? He decided to play it safe. "Oh", he said, loud enough for everybody around to hear, which included some authoritative elders, "oh, that dog stepped on my tobacco. It's probably spoilt now; maybe I should throw it away and start over?" Nobody took this bait. He rephrased this a little, and said it again a minute later, and again. Nobody spoke up, nobody picked up on his prompts. Nobody cared. He finished the job, and put the tobacco lumps away, for later ritual use.

Situations such as these suggested to me that at least for some taboos, the Kara considered them more or less arbitrary (if not random) prohibitions much more strongly enforced by the village community than by the spirits.

> *At the same time, claiming a taboo is also a mark of distinction. Only people of consequence truly have such restrictions imposed upon them – consequently, adults were subject to many more taboos than children, married men to more than unmarried men, and those ethnic subcategories within Kara that practiced fewer taboos ranked in direct correspondence lower on the local status ladder.*

My position as resident anthropologist involved both shifting roles and more stable affiliations, in regard to kinship ties, integration into clans and settlements, age-organization, and more. Still, as somebody who did not really matter in the local status system, I was under very few taboos, really, and most of these were

voluntarily assumed. But then, I was at that time unmarried, without children: even true Kara in my circumstances would have been similarly unconstrained. It all fit, more or less.

> *Now that I have a son, though, I sometimes think back to the specific set of taboos found in Kara that regulate the relation between father and eldest son.*

The eldest son may not touch his father's borkotto, the ubiquitous companion item of all men that so usefully serves as a headrest and a seat. He may not use the father's sandals. He may not touch the father's personalized drinking vessel. There is a certain prescription of avoidance, and while this was not strictly enforced, I did get the impression that fathers were easier interacting with their second- and later-born sons, at least once past the toddler stage. There was more physical contact, and more tenderness. The first sons were raised more strictly in comparison, ordered around, and kept at bay.

It would be easy to abstract this away as a facet of the (putatively) universal oedipal concern; and it is similarly unchallenging to point out the intrinsic problems of inevitable succession (for the head of a household), of inheritance, of the Kara age organization that pits cohorts of age-sets in a vertical hierarchy and that stipulates that an eldest son's marriage pretty much retires his father from active political life. Some of this is of ethnological interest, some is anecdotal, some is trivial. As a fieldworker, I noted what I learned, but I never cared much.

Now I have a son myself. He very much enjoys taking my stuff. Such as my shoes. Constantly, in fact. K'aissina! He wants, at times, to sit in my chair. K'aissina! He wants to wrestle with me, which might well lead to him "victorious" and me in an undignified position on the ground. K'aissina! So what is this about? Is there a clear functional explanation for the Kara taboos on the son's claims to daddy's stuff? Is it a tentative struggle for power? A mimetic attempt to put himself –literally– in my shoes, once, and in future?

For me, now that I experience the urgency of a little one's struggle with a world

in which some things are his and some aren't, it seems to be about autonomy and agency. Forbidding things in such a manner makes them doubly attractive; excluding the young boys from the village square makes the lure of the adult sphere stronger; delineating a cordon sanitaire not to be crossed under threat of k'aiss condemnation is the strongest provocation for a growing boy. The Kara know this. See, they also have the burrma ritual, which basically considers in stripping the young boys of the village of all their earthly belongings as a punishment for the youngsters' incessant demands to be inducted into a new age-set, i.e., to be allowed to sit on the village square with their elders. But when the boys, as it happens, do not actually do so, if they do not get organized to actually heckle their elders, to demand recognition, and to publically assert themselves as agents, why, said an old Kara curmudgeon, "we just do the burrma anyway." The experience of being jointly and ritually "robbed blind" in this manner without actual preceding provocation will bring the adolescents on their proscribed and yet oh-so necessary path after all.

> *Beyond the anthropological nod to reflexivity and ethnomethodological procedure, therein lies a lesson, of course, about pedagogy, about self-esteem, and about parenthood.*

It is interesting that only becoming a father made me appreciate some of the lessons from Kara. Among them: Taboos can be a jolly good thing to have. It's said that a father's love for his son is always tempered by ambition. (Really? Always?) Fair enough; as long as it's not pathological, I don't see why that's a bad thing. The Kara also want their sons to be people of consequence eventually. The eldest son (of ideally several) will bear the most responsibility for the household. Why not push them a little harder than the others The question remains, though: how taboo are these taboos?

For me, I am finding it feasible to import some Kara taboos into my lifeworld, basically, as arbitrarily imposed arenas for father and son to play in, to simulate an agon that he won't be facing in reality for a while yet. He can probe some

boundaries without repercussions, but we can both pretend. It's probably better than a real Oedipal complex. K'aissina! Inventing taboos for fun and profit: in the header, I call the relation between Kara fathers and their first-born sons "fraught" – and it sure is supposed to appear that way. But likely, a good number of Kara sons manage to figure out the scheme soon enough. As my son already has, at 3 and change. That he still wants to play is probably the greatest lesson I can find in this whole thing.

This post was first published on 13 May 2015.

Yes we can – and this is how! Fieldwork with kids

Miia Halme-Tuomisaari
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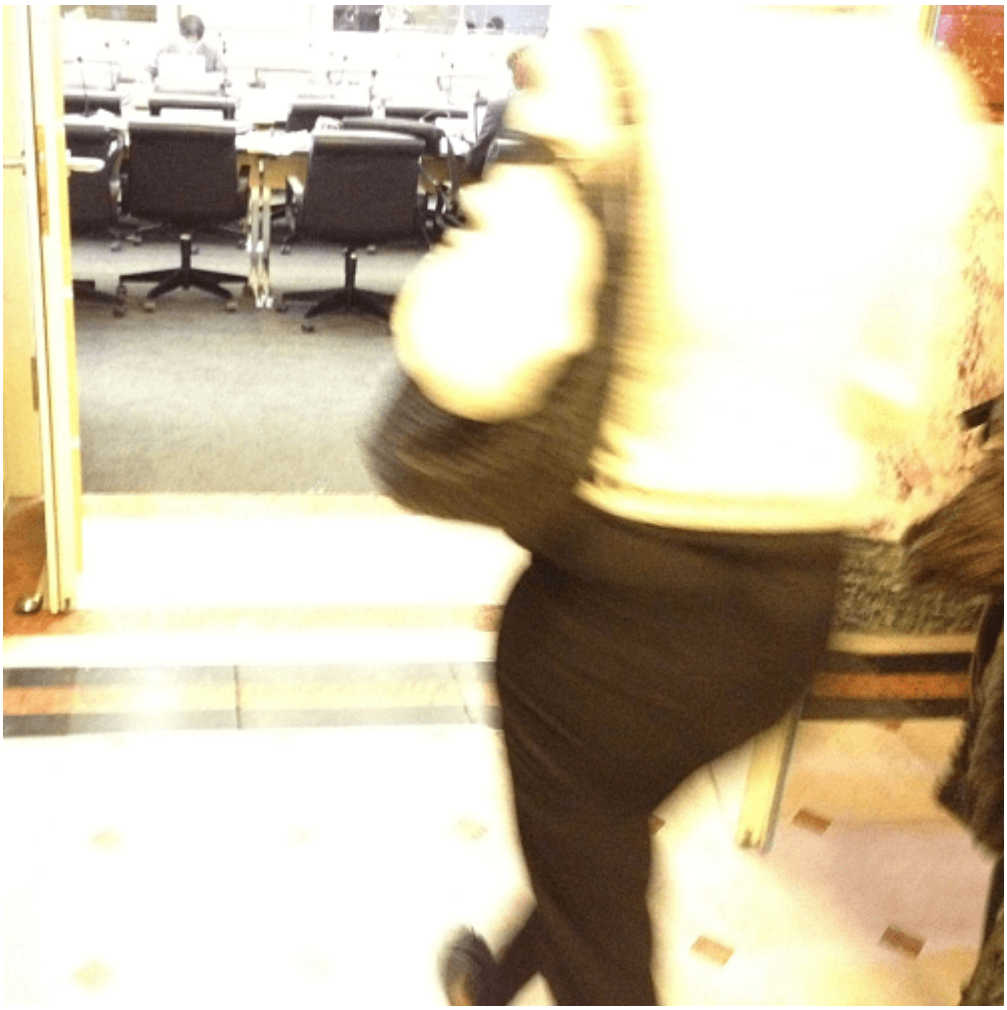

Almost exactly four years ago I arrived at Geneva airport – with my two sons then aged 1 and 4. We had set on our journey almost a full day earlier, from the German town of Halle/Saale where I was working as a researcher at the MPI. The departure alone had been chaotic: we were packing for a three week stay because of the fieldwork I was commencing at the UN Human Rights Committee.

The timing of our departure was the most difficult imaginable: my husband had to be back home in Finland for his work, and the same applied to our valiant nanny who had otherwise accompanied us in our German stay, very marvelously so. Thus although I had ample support for my work in general, on that very travel, particularly from Berlin onward, it was just me and the boys.

The day before – finally, after the customary hours of manic running around – we had left our German home, ran for the tram, then the train, then the subway. My

4-year old on his kick bike, my 1-year-old in his stroller and me with full suitcase in addition.

We stayed overnight at my dear Allie Julie's home, and she and her husband Ahmad treated us royally, once again. At night my 1-year old fell ill and threw up on our host's beautiful rug. In my half-witted state I cleaned up to the best of abilities. Needless to say sleep was not really on the menu after that; my 1-year old had also gotten a fever by the time. It was likely yet another one of those infinite ear infections that he was prone to getting.

At some ghastly hour between yesterday and tomorrow I had to jerk all of us up, assemble our luggage, and drag us all in the cab that took us to the airport. At the chaos of the airport I ran around – with two understandably grumpy kids – trying to find some cardboard with which to wrap up our 4-year old's kick bike. Bringing it along did not feel like the smartest of moves right then.

Feeling half-conscious myself I dragged the kids through endless-feeling corridors, which included numerous sets of stairs too. I did get some assistance, but people are not as helpful at such ghastly hours as you might think.

A short flight later (fortunately with no ear ache for the 1-year old!) we arrived in Geneva. I fetched our luggage, the stroller, the kick-bike and we headed toward the tram. Navigating through the unfamiliar city (not my strong suit) we eventually found our flat, and got all of us fitted in the tiny elevator. I was feeling delirious from exhaustion, yet mustering the last fragments of positive energy to keep my kids calm. Fortunately the younger one was feeling fine by that time, with no more fever or throwing up.

A few moments later we were greeted by someone who felt almost like a gift from some higher power: the former nanny of Jane Cowan's kids to whom she had graciously connected me. The relief of having another adult share some of the responsibility felt like a weight had been lifted off me.

Next it was time to empty the luggage, try to sooth the kids while our nanny-on-

loan helped us to get something to eat. Changing napkins, maybe a nap – I don't remember any more – then scrambling toward the UN to fetch my badge so that I would be all set for my fieldwork at the UN session opening the next Monday. Off we were, all four of us – the mother-researchers, two kids and the nanny.

After much waiting around, chasing after the right building I finally got my badge – and we even made it back to our flat ok. A calm night, some sleep – and after my husband arrived the next morning all started to feel normal again.

> *As Carole McGranahan's post emphasised yesterday, it is possible to be a mother and an anthropologist – but not without an extensive network of help, and more than just a whiff of stubbornness (and evidently madness).*

For me this combination was most acute during the year 2013 when I was working in Germany, my husband had his work back home in Finland, and in addition we spent three three-week periods in Geneva for my fieldwork.

Just the stay in Germany alone was a push as my husband was travelling back and forth every other week. As said, we had the extraordinary luck of having a nanny who had been with us since both of our kids were born. Because our circumstances were so complicated and multi-local we had decided against putting the kids at a local German daycare – neither one of us was even fluent in the language.

Yet even with this combination of people there were ample moments when additional help was simply of the essence – our younger son was so small that very rare were the occasions when one could manage without direct adult supervision.

Thus during the year, when both my husband and our nanny were back home, I had my mother over numerous times, as well as my aunt. We even had a local helper who covered occasional baby-sitting shifts. And then there were other Allies too from the academic network: colleagues who welcomed us in their

homes and those who tapped into their own networks to help us get support in times when it was direly needed.

Of course most of this is familiar to everyone doing fieldwork – the solidarity and helpfulness of initial strangers in moments of feeling and being totally lost is likely a much greater part of our fieldwork than we usually acknowledge.

And needless to say that all this speaks of incredible eliticism too: the luxury of having a nanny, and a spouse, helping out, of having parents and relatives who are capable of dashing to the scene – not to mention the luxury of even being allowed to do such mobile work, unobstructed by continually intensifying visa restrictions and unforeseen travel bans.

Yes, anthropology is the playing field of the globally privileged – and there is no denying this no matter how much we like to think that our political sensibilities are with the impoverished and the disadvantaged!

I do feel borderline embarrassed to think of even making a fuss of such travel details – realistically the journey wasn't even that long! And of course I know fully well how many people are zigzagging around the world in infinitely worse conditions, with no certainty as to what their final destinations will become or how long it will get to reach it. Who are facing these journeys alone, without any knowledge over the whereabouts or safety of their families.

> *Simultaneously it feels crucial to elaborate what it means to be a professional anthropologist with kids, especially when they are small. The toll that it takes to make arrangements for fieldwork – for which one has two choices: either to accept that it means time away from family, or to endure the additional hassles that bringing family along will mean.*

For my family the choice has so far been the latter, and in addition to Germany and Geneva we have spent time in New York and Johannesburg. This has been made possible by privileged research support that covered (at least parts of) the

expenses. My husband's patience has been amply tested – but on the bright side he does know quite a few good playgrounds in Manhattan.

Also my own patience has been duly tested as my fieldwork days have inevitably began and ended with intense child care shifts as my husband has crammed in his working hours in during the mornings and evenings. And of course there is the maternal guilt too – the feeling that *this is all my fault* when your kids cry from exhaustion or sleep restlessly as we settle on yet another new location.

All this been further aggravated by the nagging doubt – due to my vicarious professional situation characterised by temporary research positions – of *will all this really lead me anywhere? Am I putting my family through all this in vain?!* Of course there are other sides to these experiences too – the way in which they have undoubtedly enriched my kids' perception of the world. But one will have to continue waiting to fully see that.

When I look back at these experiences now, when my boys are older and such manic transitions are behind us, I have no idea how I managed, or how we managed. I imagine that other fieldworking moms feel the say – one just gets things done as there is no alternative. Perhaps it's safe to say that multitasking is one of our strengths as women anyway. How many working moms recognise themselves from the below skit, a response to the by-now viral video of a dad's BBC interview gone awry?

> *Whatever the case, I do take some pride in saying, on behalf of myself and all others: the field-working mother is a type of a superwoman for sure!*

There is also something very peculiar about reading my published works based on such fieldwork experiences: these texts have a very personal, emotional subtext running through the intellectual analysis of the surface. The affective connections that anthropologists have for our discipline is undoubtedly one of its defining features. These ties are nowhere as pronounced as when one's data, description and analysis become intertwined so strongly with the personal – as Reetta

Toivanen also noted in her post on doing fieldwork with kids.

And this comes also with added benefits, I will boldly argue. I may not be able to pinpoint exactly just which parts of my writing all this impacts, but I do know, beyond a doubt: I write differently now when I am an anthropologist and mother than I did before – and for this also the scholar in me has profound gratitude for the networks that make it all possible!

Miia Halme-Tuomisaari's data that she gathered during these fieldwork stays in Geneva contributed significantly to her chapter 'Embodied Universalism at the UN Human Rights Committee: Meeting the World at the Palais Wilson' of the new book 'Palaces of Hope: The Anthropology of Global Organizations', edited by Ronald Niezen and Maria Sapignoli (CUP 2017). The book will be featured in a thematic week during this spring. Miia Halme-Tuomisaari shared glimpses into her fieldwork at the UN at Allegra in a series of posts in 2013.