Top of 2016 – or thereabouts!

Allegra
February, 2017

Who can believe that it’s almost Spring – where did the time fly?! At Allegra we just realized that we never paused to reflect on all that 2016 brought with it. Let’s fix this now, and also glance into Allegra’s future!

To kick things off, one instantly faces yet another ‘who can believe’ moment: 2016 was already Allegra’s third full year. How can that be – it feels like only yesterday when we launched the first version of our website in fall 2013!

> *They grow up so fast, also these intellectual labors of love, don’t they!*

‘In house’ year 2016 meant a continued stabilization of our work flow. Those of you who have worked with us have likely discovered that our ‘production line’ runs like a well-oiled machine – continually due to our fab ‘ed ass team’ caressingly overseen by our Manager of T&S Andrea.

> *Thanks once again – we remain in deep gratitude for our team for your dedication and diligence!*

Some of you have likely also discovered that sometimes at our editorial end things have been slightly less smooth, on occasion resulting only in the hasty ‘apologies for the delay in getting back to you’ to greet your inquiries of sharing your work with us.

Collective apologies for all such moments! The reason – you guessed it – is all too familiar: being too busy. This is deeply ironic as the ‘slow movement’ is continually one of Allegra’s guiding visions embodied also by our ‘slow food manifesto’.

> *SLOW was also a central theme for Allegra in 2016 particularly via our thematic week, which featured one of our most read posts of the year: an excerpt of the new book ‘The Slow Professor’.*

Inevitably this theme linked up with another one that we simply seem unable to escape: continually intensifying university crisis. Yet, perhaps differing slightly from earlier years, in 2016 we had definitely shifted from a mere crisis mentality toward more determined searches for alternatives as our thematic week in October testified.

The week featured debates on the techniques of emotional resistance as well as collective initiatives to reclaim the universities – via the example of the team led by Tim Ingold & University of Aberdeen. It also included another pivotal opening: the Union of Precarious Academics.

Will these – and numerous other ongoing initiatives – succeed in reversing some of the detrimental dynamics plaguing the academia? Only time will tell!

> *Yet this much is undisputed also from Allegra's past year: despite of all odds suggesting the reverse, creative spirits remain vibrant and determined within anthropology!*

As merely one embodiment of this was the thematic week 'Slam that Ethnography' which featured whimsical – and serious – experiments in ethnographic writing and presentation. The outcome was a delightful and inspiring challenge to how we customarily think of our work, with many insights to keep handy for future writings!

But will these thoughts truly linger on and become 'things' with prominence in our disciplinary debates? Very difficult to say – or even more bluntly, somewhat doubtful even.

> *For 2016 also reminded us of something else: that beyond a doubt many parts of the academia and anthropological debate remain very conservative and predictable – or more candidly still, very white and male.*

This was communicated also by our most read essay of 2016, namely the reflection of the gender bias of Didier Fassin's keynote at EASA2016 by yours truly. The post drew quite a number of comments, some of them highly critical – perhaps justifiably so. The post was written fast, in the course of a few hours, and it did focus largely on 'externalities' in discussing who was quoted rather than what at the level of arguments.

Time is seldom, if ever, a justifiably defense for analytical shortcomings – yet when operating with the immediacy of the blog world, it is sometimes a necessity. In order to address 'the now', literally, one simply must forego some of the customary cautions that usually accompany our work, buffed with layers of feedback and re-writes. Yet, since the beginning of Allegra we have insisted that

on occasion we must put such caution aside and simply SAY something – also via texts that remain a tad rough around the edges.

> *Ideally such spontaneous 'blurts' – fast reactions – will continue to simmer, become more nuanced and eventually mature into slow thinking that potentially makes genuinely lasting contributions to our shared intellectual pursuits.*

Continuing such inquiries will thus allow for these swift reactions to acquire a broader role of relevance for our disciplinary field: they will provide fresh injections of thoughts, not tamed by the current fancies of scholarly debate – or so we want to believe.

Image courtesy of pixabay.com

Whether this is true or not, Allegra wants to remain a site for the spontaneous also in the future – SO DO SEND YOUR POSTS OUR WAY to submissions@allegralaboratory.net! Simultaneously our commitment to 'fast thinking' serves a crucial role in preserving the wider societal relevance of scholarship and scholars.

> *With the global political scene becoming more bizarre and scary with each passing month, and the integrity of the media being increasingly jeopardized, our voices are direly needed!*

In 2016 Allegra continued contributing to public debate around pivotal world events. This included the thread curated by Sarah Green and realized in collaboration with Social anthropology / Anthropologie sociale around #Brexit. In 2017 we look forward to intensifying our commentaries on current issues – send us your topical commentaries too!

The Brexit thread embodied another defining feature for Allegra's last year, namely collaborations: in addition to continuing our interactions with numerous EASA networks, we also collaborated with Open Democracy as we cross-posted our virtual round table on irregular migration. We also launched the 'Projects' sub-page of the website, including the one around the Wenner-Gren funded workshop on political agency in the Middle East.

And of course there was our joint popular writing contest to find the next Margaret Mead arranged with the newcomer in anthro blogosphere, SAPIENS. The experience of running this competition itself was somewhat – searching for a proper word – 'odd'. Was it the right choice to invite post submissions via a competition in particular?

> *Aren't we seeing enough of competition in the academia as is without having us add to it? And isn't the very idea of competition 'anti-Allegra' thinking of our devotion toward facilitating the flow of scholarly content & embracing the spirit of collegial solidarity? How could one even assess which piece of writing is 'the best' – best how, as in 'analytically riveting' or 'bring tears to your eyes'?!*

Indeed, we asked ourselves these and many more questions, and it is not certain that we fully agreed. However, all this feels very Allegra too: being open to experiments that divide even us at the editorial board. After all, insistence on

unanimity may be stifling too, no matter how whimsical the motivations behind it!

In 2017 the diversity of Allegra's voice is certain to continue expanding as our editorial board has grown: we are very pleased to welcome Jon Schubert in as an editor, and also to note that our language editor Sarita Fae has been transformed into an Associate Editor – warm welcome to you both & thanks for all your had work!

Allegra's editorial board has seen also other changes as Antonio De Lauri has assumed the role of editor-in-chief with Julie Billaud as Miia Halme-Tuomisaari has started to focus more on developing Allegra's visibility & social media presence. She's assisted by Gennady Kurushin who is doing diverse technical improvements on our beloved website. We are also pleased to welcome our intern Lena Pham who will be assisting in Allegra's social media presence alongside numerous other tasks.

> *We look forward to seeing the results of this work soon – the ultimate goal being to allow for Allegra's content to travel even further.*

For this week's posts we have selected writings that resonate with the unfolding political scene, particularly in the US, in diverse ways. We open tomorrow with a post that has sadly grown only more timely since it was first published in our Brexit thread las summer, namely Jennifer Curtis's consideration of the similarities between Brexit and Trump's – then still looming – victory. The post is a powerful call for nuanced public engagement which anthropology, particularly its political and legal brands, are ideally equipped to offer.

On Wednesday we continue our discussion via a post that – almost unexpectedly – links up with Curtis's discussion: we share Bradley Dunseith's post 'Being "a good guy with a gun"'. The post transports readers to pro-gun meetings in the deep US south, to land that is likely foreign to most entertaining leftist liberal inclinations. The post remains at the level of fieldnotes and is thus mostly untheorized. Sharing fieldnotes has been and remains an 'Allegra thing' as we believe that they have

numerous under-explored uses. These include demonstrating the power of anthropological empathetic description, which can help us to understand the motivations of 'others' – and to avoid polarisations entirely.

On Thursday we continue this debate via a review that has – sadly – only grown more topical since it was first published in October 2016: 'The Borderlands of Race' by Jennifer Najera, reviewed by David Fazzino. The book discusses the drawing of boundaries and Mexican segregation in a South Texas town. Both the review and the book itself offer much needed context for the current US debate around deportations and walls.

On Friday we conclude this thematic week via another genre distinctive of Allegra: AVMoFA, Allegra's very own Museum of Obscure Fieldwork Artefacts by taking us back to 'Breakfast in Aidland' with Astrid Jamar.

When connected to the continually darkening global political climate with nationalist backlashes all around, this post raises poignant thoughts: what role does 'the international' – or the global elites that make up humanitarian and human rights & development regimes – hold in what we see unfolding around us? These are questions that we have not yet asked nearly enough – yet they are questions that we must ask in order to fully grasp what we see unfolding around us.

> *Once again, anthropology is the very discipline to assist there. We hope that you enjoy this thematic week – and do send us your ideas and post submissions, including the wacky, experimental and even the down-right bizarre!*

Featured image (cropped) by Benjamin Disinger (flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The past, the present and the future

Allegra
February, 2017

It’s time for some exciting events!! Let’s go on a little bit of a time travel as we attempt to anticipate the future and reflect upon the past, while also discussing the value of knowledge and methodologies of the digital age for research in the social sciences and humanities.

As always, if you want your event to feature in our next event list or if you feel like writing a short report, do not hesitate to get in touch with Andrea at

andreak@allegralaboratory.net or Aude at audef@allegralaboratory.net

Conference: Anticipating law: the prognostics of fear and hope

19-21 September 2017, Bern, Switzerland

Many laws are geared towards organising and regulating the future. Some of these pursue specific developmental goals ('Social engineering') and attempt to shape the future by giving incentives for achieving those goals; others are geared more specifically toward preventing future events and diminishing risk. Moreover, the regulation and prevention of events in the future is a legal field of increasing importance; this is related to rapid technological change that poses problems of unknown effects ever more frequently, think of Nanotechnology, Climate change, Robotics and the like (see Beck 1996). The hopes of shaping the future by legal regulation have diminished in the face of the seemingly autonomous dynamics of distributed agency in a globalised world, and have given way to logics of prevention.

The regulation of the future is, of course, implicit in law generally, as law is based on the assumption that it orients action by people and thereby produces wanted outcomes in the future and prevents unwanted ones, by threat of sanction or by award of benefit. However, theories about law's effect on human action change. They change in accordance with changing understandings of safety and security and related ideas of what it needs to produce or safeguard social order. Whether thus preventive logics or those, which are confident about the possibilities of law to shape the future, prevail – in short: how hope and fear are inscribed in law – is a matter of social analysis. [more]

Deadline for submissions of abstracts: 1 March 2017

Conference: [The family, human rights and internationalism: global historical-sociological perspectives]

10-11 November 2017, University of Göttingen, Germany

Historical and historical-sociological research on the history of human rights discourse and law has abounded in recent years. However, it has neglected one of the key issues that informed early thinking about human rights: the family as a protected category. This conference addresses this issue by approaching it from the perspective of global historical sociology. In this way, the conference also sheds important light on the historical diffusion of cultural and legal norms on the family and sexuality. It reflects on various religious and other imaginaries of the family and considers how they emerged and spread across the globe. How have human rights law and discourse intersected with the family and sexuality? How has this connection taken shape in different historical contexts? And, how has it evolved since the nineteenth century?

The conference brings together historians and historical sociologists interested in the global development of norms and practices related to the family through international law, international institutions, migration and empires. Papers are invited that focus on these issues from a historical perspective for the nineteenth and twentieth century. They can consider various mechanisms through which norms on the family intersected with ideas about human rights, for example, through empires and their collapse; intellectuals; war; and, migration, amongst others. Papers on regions around the globe are welcome, as are contributions on relevant international bodies and individuals who have been influential in this regard. [more]

Deadline for submission of proposals: 31 March 2017

International conference: [The international conference on humanities, social sciences and sustainability (IXSUS2017)]

30-31 October 2017, Hawaii Convention Center, Honolulu, Hawaii

With the theme of **'Resilience'** the conference will promote a critical understanding of the innovative and organic approaches from the humanities and social sciences toward sustainability. Our shared biosphere and rapid globalization ensure no country is immune from another's problems and risks, which means a collective and multidisciplinary approach is essential for integrating environmental and cultural sustainability.

Contemporaries tend to define sustainability as environmental issue; however, it is important to take a holistic perspective that embraces the critical relationship between ecological sciences and humanities. This is evident as human communities as well as their diverse biological and cultural heritage are increasingly threatened by mounting environmental and societal problems from climate change and exploitation of finite resources to the inequities and human costs of unsustainable practices and technologies. **[more]**

Deadline for submission of proposals: 28 July 2017

Interdisciplinary workshop: Science.Knowledge.[E]Valuation

9-10 March 2017, University of Warwick, England

Wherever there emerge value judgments, classifications and hierarchies there occurs valuation – social construction of values. Recent years have seen the emergence of a new field of scientific inquiry – Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation (SVE), which deals with valuation practices in many areas, such as social relations, economics, knowledge production. It is on this last area that we wish to focus on during a workshop on *science.knowledge.[e]valuation*.

As researchers we encounter (and perform) valuation every day– be it in assessing our own and other researcher's work, writing grant proposals, dealing with Higher Education policy and in a host of other situations. But construction of values related to knowledge(s) is by no means limited to academia. We can think of valuation practices taking place in relation to science in non-academic context, but also of construction of values in the political sphere, in economics, education or in every-day micro practices. [more]

International conference : E-Methodology

29-30 March 2017, Wroclaw, Poland

The International Academic Conference "e-methodology" is dedicated to the difficulties connected with research in social sciences and humanities conducted by means of the Internet, as well as the opportunities that it provides. We accept theoretical lectures on this subject and lectures presenting the results of research conducted on or by means of the Internet (understood as a research environment and/or a research tool). We would like the authors to pay special attention to the specificity of Internet methodology.

We propose three sections:
1) "About the Internet" – Theory. (Theoretical papers on the difficulties and the

opportunities created by using the Internet in scientific research)
2) “On the Internet”- Research (The results of research conducted by means of the Internet)
3) “With the Internet”- Projects (Project reports and research/educational projects presenting the opportunities provided by using the Internet) [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 28 February 2017

Conference : Urban scholarship, urban activism and justice struggles: The Academy as enabler of emancipatory politics?

11-13 September 2017, Leeds, England

Drawing on Marcuse’s plea to translate urbanists’ knowledge into action (2009), this panel calls for contributions exploring the relationship between academic research and organizations centered on issues of urban justice in the context of contemporary urban social movements and organizational politics.

The panel favors contributions featuring case studies that can illuminate the comparative investigation of how urban scholarship and reflective urban practice can positively contribute to justice struggles and political change, and the enabling role the academy can have throughout the tormented journey to produce “cities for people, not for profit” (Brenner, Marcuse, and Meyer 2012).[more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 10 March 2017

On Extroverted Expertise, One-Handed Scientists & Dirty Laundry #REDUX

Vincent Ialenti
February, 2017

In 2014, Vincent Ialenti wrote about deflated optimisms among European scientists grappling with political questions about their legitimacy, the capitalization of their expertise, and the frustrations of increasingly working under non-scientist managers. Did these ethnographic accounts presage the so-called post-truth, alternative-fact, nationalist-populist moment of anti-elite, anti-

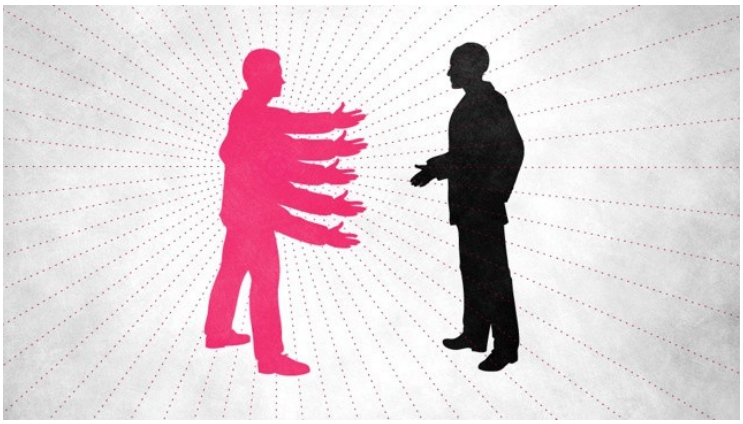
technocrat, anti-expert fervor we see today?

I have spent the few past years conducting anthropological research among many different kinds of experts working in the nuclear energy sector in general and on the challenge of managing high-level nuclear waste in particular. Periodically throughout this ethnographic process, I found the opportunity to reflect more generally on matters of expertise, broadly construed, with scientists, engineers, and other experts of a variety of nationalities working in variety of other sectors. Some of these experts worked in academia, others worked in government research institutes, some worked for corporations, others were retired or unemployed. Some were acquainted with my nuclear energy or nuclear waste management expert informants as friends from outside of work, as colleagues, or from their university years. Others were not acquainted with them at all. In September 2013, I had a long conversation of this kind with a scientist in his fifties with a background in Physics and Engineering.

Precisely where this conversation unfolded is almost beside the point: the concerns addressed, we have both observed, are pertinent in many cultures of expertise throughout both of our home continents of Europe and North America. And so too do they, I suggest, resonate with a host of challenges with which we as anthropologists increasingly grapple in our own professional contexts. Given Allegra's proclivity for experimentation, I would like to use this space to momentarily step away from my usual focus on nuclear energy sector worlds and to give platform to this scientist's critical perspectives on trends he saw as emerging widely in myriad cultures of expertise.

Our talk began when this expert, jovial and talkative, noted his skepticism with what he saw as a new set of imperatives that had emerged at his workplace – a partially state-funded, but increasingly privately-funded, applied technological research organization – over the past twenty or so years. This expert was quick to note that, when relaying his skepticism of these new imperatives to other scientists and engineers from other research institutes, universities, government

agencies, and consultancies inside and outside his home country, they often responded with anecdotes from their own organizations that resonated closely with his own. So while the skepticisms he expressed – speculative, anecdotal, and based largely on intuition and hearsay – constitute just one expert's critical reflections on just one context of expert practice, they are to be taken seriously. His broadest concern implicated growing pressures on the dispositions and the communicativeness of scientists, engineers, and other experts.



> *To make it in science these days you really have to be more of an extrovert. You've got to talk more. Once you could be the eccentric mad scientist who does things nobody understands. Now it doesn't work like that. You cannot hide in your tower of expertise. You have to get funding. You have to know how to talk to the bosses who are, increasingly, not scientists. You have to understand their buzzwords, their code words, know their vocabulary, and use their dictionary. You must use the words they love in order to get funding. But, still, the gap between the scientists and the bosses is real. If you start using the terminology of the bosses too often, you might lose your credibility in your field among more competent scientists.*

We agreed that the rise of such imperatives toward what he called 'extraversion', however, is not an entirely negative development. Communication skills, of course, lead to greater feedback on and public understanding of one's expert work. They help forge what historian of science Peter Galison would call a '[trading zone](#)' to enable mutual understanding and the cross-pollination of ideas across disparate fields and subfields. They facilitate more comprehensible reporting and documentation, which future generations will sorely need when attempting to understand the ins and outs of the work of their predecessors. And

they foster keener discussions across disciplinary, linguistic, national, and cultural borders in increasingly specialized and globally interconnected cultures of expertise.

However, as my interlocutor noted, these shifts cannot be approached with entirely rose-colored glasses, especially when they become entangled with the vocabularies of research funding politics, of the audit, of investment, of legalese, and of administration. Indeed, as a physicist working down the hall from him once told me, the influx of transparency, traceability, and reporting requirements throughout his organization over the years had created what he saw as a climate in which 'everyone is trying to advertise everything to everyone else'. It used to, as this non-native-English-speaking expert in his late fifties said of his career's earlier years, be more 'about the science' than about reporting everything he does in 'Oxford English' and making tidy Excel spreadsheets. This coincided with a proliferation of funding agency schemes for fixed-term 'projects', of universities' expectations that researchers secure (on their own) more and more external funding for their work, and of companies and agencies in many contexts relying increasingly on short-term subcontracted experts rather than signing on 'lifers' for long, stable, secure careers. As our conversation progressed, my interlocutor echoed this.

The unsettling thing is that today all your time is wasted begging for money. There is more and more this massive bureaucracy run by more business-oriented people counting money all the time. This is something growing, I mean, in all sorts of organizations. It is like a spreading disease. The problem is that we have highly respected scientists here who are absolute zeroes from a commercial point of view. We get fired up about this when discussing it in the

> *coffee room. It is great to talk in the coffee room with likeminded critical people who are intelligent. But there we speak our own language. I guess what groups like us need today is an interpreter or a mediator between us and the bosses.*

Communicating across such divides requires more than just an intellectual understanding of another set of vocabularies, buzzwords, and standards for gauging the quality of such an organization's research outputs. Certain personalities are, of course, better suited to these tasks than others. And often, the expert noted, these sorts of personalities are of the very ilk of which his more established scientific colleagues have traditionally been skeptical. The 'guardians of the best knowledge' have long focused, I was told, on the content, substance, or rigor of one's research and hence have been quicker to raise their eyebrows when too much 'entertainment' seeps into, say, an expert's Powerpoint presentation. When presenting one's work to a room full of experts at the very top of one's field, he noted, one is in a 'minefield'. That is, one ought to be more hesitant, concise, and careful – not more enthusiastic, effusive, and ebullient – than one would otherwise be in everyday conversation. This is because what is of interest to the guardians of the best knowledge is the quality of one's words and findings—not their quantity, nor the tone of voice or eloquence of the researcher presenting them. Do such imperatives to create hype about one's work among non-scientist or non-engineer managers, to network and to charm, to be intensely 'productive', to be one's own pitchman, or to justify eloquently the relevance of one's research to secure funding from non-scientists run counter to the calm, confident, mild-mannered comportment associated with traditional stereotypes of the astute scientist? If so, what will come, in contexts like these, of more contemplative experts – often tagged 'eccentric' or 'introverted' – soberly deliberating persuasive numbers, data, theories, and findings in drab monotone? What about those reluctant to jump on trendy flavor-of-the-week research bandwagons or those who favor of longer, slower, but more thorough research trajectories?

Being a scientist you are normally quite humble in how you express yourself. Let your research do the talking. But, talking to those guys, you must abandon that. You must present yourself as on top of the world: 'I'm the owner of Europe and you are lucky to have the opportunity to talk to me'. Being, say, too modest is not seen as a virtue… In this case it might mean you get these extroverts who like to sit in coffee rooms, have small talk, and do nothing else. That's the danger. This is just an intuitive sense I have… Beneath all this small talk, this politeness, this extrovert stuff, there has to be kind of a cool core. Being a nice guy is not enough. You must still understand stuff and that has been my message all the way.

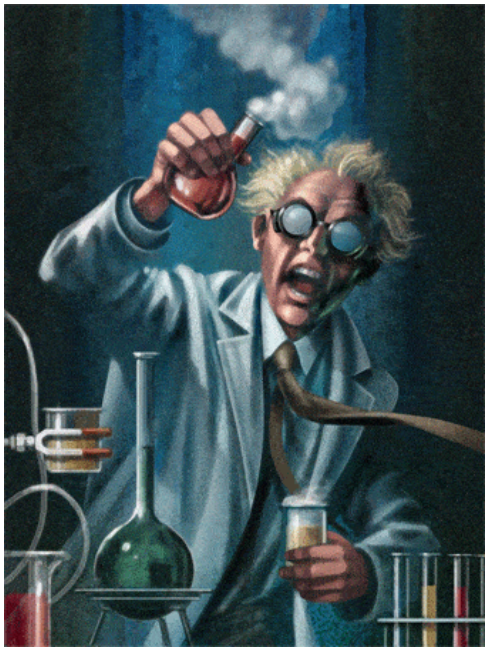
In encounters with his organization's increasingly business-oriented leaders, experts also had to navigate asymmetries between their and their managers' and funders' professional career outlooks. Whereas his organization had recently seen over eighty layoffs of scientists, there had not yet been a case of a higher-up manager being laid off for the sake of downsizing. While heartened that a rule allowing bosses to be laid off had recently been implemented, he noted his skepticism about whether the necessary cost-cutting within the organization – ongoing in many universities, research institutes, funding agencies, and consultancies since the global financial turmoils of 2007-2008 – would indeed play out in such a way. That being said, the infusion of financial, business, and managerial expertises steering the upper echelons of this particular technological research organization had not proven entirely negative for him and for his colleagues. Having bosses who understood little about what they did as experts and who almost never showed their faces in the experts' offices or laboratories had its perks. Things were indeed different back in the 'old days' when scientists,

engineers, or other experts working there would simply rise in the ranks to become the organization's leadership. Then, young recruits – if they were to propose research that might challenge substantively the scientific findings upon which their superiors' reputations had been predicated – faced impasses to moving their careers forward. Today, this problem has been all but obviated.

Also worthy of concern, the expert noted, is the increasing visibility of what he called the media-friendly 'one-handed scientist'.

> *Scientific discussion works because scientists are 'are on one the hand, on the other hand' people. Scientists should not be one-handed: good scientists have a certain vagueness in expression so that the more experienced and the better a scientist, the less he or she is giving you straightforward opinions that are easy to digest… Young scientists in my team like making absolute statements, say, in their theses. My standard comment is, 'no, you must kind of dilute this, qualify it, say that this is so because we have this kind of evidence'… In this way, the two-handed scientist is not so nice to the one-eyed journalist who would like a clear opinion from him or her. Whenever you talk to an experienced scientist, it is always such that you can never really get his or her neck in a loop. You can't nail him or her down.*

A one-handed scientist was said to, more often than not, be an expert who – perhaps feeling like he or she has not been given the recognition he or she deserves within his or her own field – frequently takes hard opinions publically on issues, adopts narrow activist stances, and brings internal scientific controversies to the media.



The thing is, they get the recognition, but not necessarily from the people they would like to get it from. Your respected colleagues might think that okay, now this person has sort of sold himself or herself out to the media. Now they're in a different category altogether. Often, if you want to be a serious scientist, you don't talk too much to the media. You talk in your own circles and you criticize things in your own circles. There might be quite hectic debates in some project meetings, but they are kind of keeping their dirty laundry in house. That is how the scientific process works. You may disagree heavily on some issues, but outside to the public and media you just say that there is some scientific discussion going on.

Such skepticisms of emerging trends in expert cultures – in this case, implicating imperatives toward extroverted expertise, one-handed scientists, and attention-seeking experts who air their 'dirty laundry' in public – are examples of the sorts of reflective critiques of today's regimes of knowledge-creation and technological development manifesting within experts' insider worlds. As such, they are accessible to ethnographers who venture to engage them in the field with the aim of opening them to critical scrutiny and further elaboration by humanists, social scientists, and other analysts. It is also the case that if such critiques could be thought to resonate (or not resonate) with imperatives emerging within still other cultures of expertise – like, say, those of Anthropology – then perhaps they could shed light on imperatives that contour our own expert practices and vice versa. At any rate, what is certain is that further ethnographic work within contemporary cultures of expertise is especially necessary in the present moment. Perhaps proclamations like those in Tom Nichols' December 2013 blog post *The Death of Expertise* can shed some light on why.

More seriously, I wonder if we are witnessing the 'death of expertise': a Google-fueled, Wikipedia-based, blog-sodden collapse of any division between students and teachers, knowers and wonderers, or even between those of any achievement in an area and those with none at all… what I fear has died is any acknowledgement of expertise as anything that should alter our thoughts or change the way we live. A fair number of Americans now seem to reject the notion that one person is more likely to be right about something, due to education, experience, or other attributes of achievement, than any other… we now live in a world where the perverse effect of the death of expertise is that, without real experts, everyone is an expert on everything… There are no longer any gatekeepers: the journals and op-ed pages that were once strictly edited have been drowned under the weight of self-publishable blogs (like, say, this one). There was once a time when participation in public debate required submission of a letter or an article, and that submission had to be written intelligently, pass editorial review, and stand with the author's name and credentials attached.

Alongside this, there have also been skepticisms voiced about shifts in public understandings of cultures of expertise in, for example, my home country, the

United States. For instance, a 2012 *Scientific American* article noted the 'anti-intellectual conformity that is gaining strength in the U.S. at precisely the moment that most of the important opportunities for economic growth, and serious threats to the well-being of the nation, require a better grasp of scientific issues'. Parsing what 'has turned so many Americans against science', the author noted politicizations of expert knowledge gaining ground on both sides of the political spectrum (in debates about stem cell research, vaccines, climate change, evolution etc). He also noted how 'the intellectual tools currently being used by the political right' to foster anti-scientism have origin in the 'academic left', which has since the 1960s-70s drawn 'ideas from cultural anthropology and relativity theory to argue that truth is relative and subject to the assumptions and prejudices of the observer'. Tracing how this has recast science as 'just one of many ways of knowing' that is 'neither more nor less valid than others', the author lamented how journalists no longer feel compelled to 'dig to get to the truth'. Now, they opt rather to 'simply present "both sides" of contentious issues' to fabricate a 'false balance' that transforms debates about topics over which experts once had credible authority into mere 'warring opinions'. But have such imperatives to inclusively balance a diversity of perspectives really come to outweigh the imperatives to weigh the rigor, quality, or legitimacy of one perspective over another that once gave experts their authority?

Answers to these questions are, of course, unclear. But while in the United States the most explicit anti-science or anti-academic rhetoric surely comes from the political right, it is clear that this more implicit mainstreaming of distrust in cultures of expertise defies any locatable position on the political spectrum or any divide separating hard sciences from soft sciences. Such conditions, I suggest, underscore the need for more ethnographic research to be conducted within cultures of expertise now and in the future. This is especially so given the concurrent entrenchment of what computer scientist Cyril Labbé has called the 'spamming war started at the heart of science'—that is, that ever-more-intense pressure to publish with frequency that now affects researchers from all fields, from Anthropology to Physics, from Theology to Mathematics. Physicist Peter Higgs recently articulated his own frustrations with such growing imperatives in a way that surely mirrors frustrations often articulated in Anthropology. In December 2013, the Nobel laureate expressed his sense that he 'wouldn't be productive enough for today's academic system', noting too his doubts as to whether 'work like Higgs boson identification' would even be 'achievable now as academics are expected to "keep churning out papers". So, as we are all entangled with these shifts unfolding within myriad cultures of expertise, is it time for us to embrace the unifying tag 'expert' as a source of inspiration, motivation, and pride for highly trained people of all fields? Could further ethnographic research on cultures of expertise – in the sciences, in engineering, in the social sciences, in the humanities etc – aid in navigating a present in which events like 'The Arts & Humanities: Endangered Species?' are organized and in which entire academic fields are targeted by political forces?

I began this post by painting an ethnographic portrait of but one expert's way of

coming to know shifts that have emerged over roughly the past two decades within his own particular institutional context. Doing so unveiled a number of situation-specific skepticisms of how a permeation of sensibilities – inextricable from the logics of finance, management, administration, and capital – at the upper echelons of the applied technological research organization at which he worked had led to what he saw as unsavory consequences. In light of this, I wonder: what other skepticisms of similar or dissimilar shifts are being cultivated in contexts of expert practice elsewhere? Do such skepticisms resonate with those being articulated by experts at the applied technological research firm where my interlocutor developed his career? How might such articulations be accessed ethnographically and what can they teach us about commonalities and differences that exist at present between expert cultures of, say, science and engineering and expert cultures of the humanities and social sciences? And what sorts of shifts do fun, fast-paced, upbeat, and productive blog websites – like, for instance, *Allegra: A Virtual Lab of Legal Anthropology* – usher in within our own contexts of anthropological practice? Do they, for instance, serve to *stave off* or, rather, *push forward* shifts resembling (a) the allegedly emerging 'Death of Expertise' articulated by Nichols and/or (b) emerging imperatives resonant with those articulated by my skeptical interlocutor?

This post was first published on 4 June 2014.

Fighting a wildfire on a gun range,

or, the sensuous memories of #fieldwork

Lindsey Feldman
February, 2017

Introduction

I fought 32 wildfires over fifteen months as part of my ethnographic research. I fought them with men who are currently in prison. Many western U.S. states use prison labor to fight wildfires. My dissertation examines this atypical prison program, focusing on the experiences with and meanings of such risky, skilled

work from the perspective of program participants. In order to get at these meanings of wildfire work for incarcerated people, I had to jump in and dig trenches and handle flamethrowers from time to time. Fighting fires is intense, and so overwhelming from a research perspective, that I had to come up with a specific approach to remembering them.

> *In general, fieldwork is a multi-sensed thing. Ethnographies inevitably include what anthropologists saw, heard, smelled, tasted, and felt throughout fieldwork.*

During my time in the field, I fought many fires that were small, miles away from the big flames, or that were nearly contained. These fires were fun and smoky and tiring, but manageable in the ethnographic sense. I could whip out my recorder and take notes, ask questions, reflect. But on the occasions that I went on the line[1] with the crew to do an initial attack, meaning there was a giant wall of flames that we were sent in to extinguish, I did not write anything down. I barely thought of anything but breathing and watching for shifts in the wind. Even just 10 minutes after I got off the fireline, when I tried to scribble down what I saw, I often forgot certain details because I had seen so much that it overwhelmed me.

So, over the course of fieldwork, I came up with a system to make at least some sense of my thoughts in those swirling, manically penned fieldnotes right after fighting a fire. First, I would write a descriptive summary of the fire event. Then, I broke down what I remembered by my senses: Sight, Sound, Smell, Taste, and Touch. Finally, I added a "Body" category, which described what I felt, not with my fingers and toes, but with my gut. Fear. Thrill. Exhaustion. Things that emanated from within and through me. These were the hardest to explain, but the most important in moving my writing forward.

Below is an example of one of these sets of fieldnotes. I first wrote it the night of the fire, after we had settled into a local fire department to sleep before going back on the line the next day. I expanded the summary a bit when I got home a few days later, fleshing out sentences to be full and flowing. But, for the most part, here is a day in the inferno laid bare.

Fieldnotes, 9 p.m., Wednesday, May 25

I was just on the Ransom Fire[2], which ballooned from 80 to 2,000 acres right in front of our eyes, running up and down the hills straight towards the center of a military base and its residents. It was a fire that some compared to disastrous ones, where firefighters lost their lives, because of how quickly it went from textbook containment to out-of-control. Upon arrival to the fire, when it was small but moving fast, we got out in front of the blaze, which was started on one of the base's gun ranges with a .50 caliber bullet. We saw it moving towards us fast, and we worked even faster with drip torches and water to burn backwards towards it, so that when the fire got to us, it would have nothing left in its reach to burn.

We wrapped around it, burning the fuel on the ground and running multiple miles to put out spot fires. After about 6 hours, just when we thought we had boxed out the fire[3] and its movement, a tiny ember from a torching mesquite tree jumped the line[4] we had created, because the winds had kicked up to 45 mph at the hottest and driest part of the day. It happened right at the witching hour.

> *Wildland firefighters describe this time of day as when the demons come out to play.*

The ember lit two blades of dry grass, then 10, then exponentially grew. It jumped the line and we watched it explode. There was a moment of shaky calm, standing on a hilltop watching the fire move swiftly towards the town, when we convened with Incident Command, laughed at how useless the last 6 hours were, and got our new orders. The crew was tasked to run straight towards the fire, to chase it like you'd chase a dog with a propensity to run, who you watched wiggle free from its collar right before your eyes. The crew battled the fire's right flank, another crew got its left[5]. For an hour the crew of 23 men toiled, steady but swiftly, spaced evenly at the edge of the blackened area, digging line, spraying hoses, beating the lapping flames with their tools. To no avail. They got called off the direct attack. It was failing, and moving faster towards civilization. They got the order to run. Each crewmember had logged 7 hours already, with 10 miles of

furious paced hiking on their feet, 90 pounds on each of their backs, smoky ash coating their mouths and eyes and ears. They were ordered to run further than the fire had reached, and to make one last attempt to burn backwards into the wall of flames. And they did.

They burned with abandon. Before the fire had jumped the line, our back-burn was slow, methodical. Now it was all guns blazing. Still strategic and smart, but with considerably more swearing. Drip torches met dry earth, the winds whipped up, and the flames were carried back towards the main fire. The smoke plume quadrupled in size, as trees and brush and grass and animals unable to run went up in flames. This time the wind favored Man. You could hear the demon shrieking its goodbye. The intentional burn that the crew laid down met the runaway one, and the fire ceased. 10 hours later, within hundreds of yards of the backyards of the community that relied on these crews, it was done.

So, the Ransom Fire. That was what happened in a nutshell. Now here is what I experienced with things other than words.

Sight:

- The wall of flame. It was moving north, towards us. We were burning back towards it. I kept thinking "shouldn't we get out of its way?" I kept looking at the guys' reactions to judge if I should panic. No one looked concerned. It was dark orange, unlike the flame we were putting down which was light orange. The flame wall was dark because trees were torching in its march forward, creating black smoke.
- A family of four deer darted past us. Three adults, one young stag. Their fur was slightly smoking, but they didn't look burnt. Maybe singed. Rabbits ran past us. A skunk was hauling ass. Faster than I ever knew a skunk could move. We all wished them luck.

- The air show. One command plane (who was looking down, telling us what the big fire was doing), two smaller helicopters dragging orange buckets of water, another plane dumping slurry (the red gashes that land on the

ground, fire retardant), and then the big mama, the Chinook copter, carrying 2,100 gallons of water. They were hovering over us constantly, zooming in and out. Now you see them, now you don't.

- Smoke. Everything looks epic. A person walking towards you is normal, a person walking towards you with a giant blaze and an acre of black smoke behind them looks like an action movie poster. I lose my sight every 20 or so seconds, and I blink furiously to bring things back to focus. Everyone is trading tips on how to make it sting less. I just have to wait for my eyes to go numb.
- The shimmer. You know when it gets really hot outside, and you see the heat mirages rising off the pavement? That's what wildfire looks like, everywhere. Everything is a heat mirage, if you stare at one thing too long you start to feel queasy. It's like you're moving through a funhouse-mirrored room, made out of flames.

Sound:

- A fire sounds like ten thousand things at once. The sound is the most overwhelming part. Every time a tree torches (meaning it goes up like a match being struck), it sounds like 10 million pieces of Velcro being ripped at the same exact time. And then you add 2 trees, 3, 4…It gets loud. There are hums of the engine supplying you water to put out flames, the crackling of grass burning, the air show. My ears ache after a while.
- Bullets and bombs. Yes, actually. Some of the prisoners and correctional officers are U.S. military veterans, and they were yelling at me above the roar of the flames and the engines and the Chinook above that this wasn't too far from a war zone. They would know. The fire was racing across 10 different military ranges, all of which had various explosive devices on the ground from previous training sessions. Bullets were popping every few minutes, and training bombs would explode (their blasts much less dangerous than actual bombs, but the sound was similar) every so often.

Most of the time our backs were turned away from the fire, because we were looking for spot fires on the unburned grass ahead of us, so we would just hear bullets and bombs go off without seeing them. It was hard not to duck.

Smell:

- Wildfire smells good. It smells wrong, it triggers something deep within your lizard brain that says This Isn't Right, but it also smells like raw power. Like a campfire, but mixed with gasoline and sweat.
- Slurry rains down from airplanes and it smells acrid and bitter. Everyone prays it doesn't land on them, because it's not good for your skin. Some guys love the smell of it, it means things got REAL. Most people say the smell makes them choke.
- The guys with drip torches get singed. Their hair burns, they have little patches missing where their clothes didn't cover them. They smell their own burned hair the rest of the day.

Taste:

- At a certain point, my mouth is covered in ash. I swallow it. The shroud is wrapped around my mouth, the piece of fabric that attaches to my helmet and protects my neck and mouth and nose, which is a lifesaver but also didn't let me blow my nose. So my nose starts running like I'm on a crazy ayahuasca trip, and I start inhaling the salt from my sweat and the snot from my nose and the ash from the fire and the only reason it doesn't make me sick is because I'm not even paying attention to it.

- My water—my sweet, sweet water slung to my hips—has started to boil. It's worse when it's hotter outside, but the intense heat from the fire nullifies any fancy water storage unit I bought with a research grant. I drink my boiling water, because I have to. It tastes faintly like smoke.

Touch:

- My whole body is aching but I have no idea yet. I'll feel it later. My skin has a flash burn, it looks like I fell asleep in the sun. Everyone is operating at probably 100 degrees, our blood feeling hot and slightly sludgy. I keep drinking water. My feet are starting to ache but I don't let myself think about that yet. I still have so many more miles to go. When we're done for the day, we will all take off our boots and compare blisters and burns. It's a game no one wants to win.
- The Chinook misdirected his water bucket and we got slammed with 2,100 gallons of water. It was disgusting water, from some holding pond full of shit I don't even want to think of, but oh god, it felt so good. We all high-fived.
- Reassurances. The guys are constantly physically checking in with each other. These crews do not pride themselves on machismo. They value the opposite: caring for one another and making sure they all stay safe and healthy. To do this on a fire, they have to get up close and personal. They adjust each other's packs. They grab each other's shoulders and squeeze, intimate reassurances. They high five or chest bump when they do something cool. They make each other look them in the eyes, to see that they are focused and hydrated. They make each other drink water. They check in like this with me too.

Body:

- My stomach flipped when I saw the wall of flames move towards us for the first time. One of the guys asked, "Are you OK?" And I said I was scared, a little. He said it was OK to be scared. I definitely felt a wave of nausea like I was going to puke, but I didn't. He stuck by me the whole time after that, and asked how I was doing every 10 minutes.
- I am so tired. I can't sleep tonight. I am in a fire department sleeping next to 23 dudes and they are all passed out and snoring. They are full, they ate at Golden Corral which is the most amazing thing to watch. I think they pretty much demolished the restaurant's food supply. But I can't sleep. I'm too amped. I need to sleep. But I keep seeing fire when I close

my eyes.

- The demon. I had heard about this phenomenon, but this time I saw it. In each wildfire, a demon resides. You can never see it while you're fighting it. Only when you look back at your pictures do you see a demonic shape in a singular flame. A head, like Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, reaching out towards the camera. It appeared this time in a torching tree as a crewmember stood nearby. Apparently the demon is there to let you know it can kill you if you don't keep your eyes and ears sharp, if you don't watch out for falling trees or if you make a dumb decision. It is always lurking. On fires where firefighters have died, there is always a demon to be found when looking back at pictures. We were flipping through my pictures after dinner, all nestled in our sleeping bags, and I saw it. Someone else noticed it too. He shouted, "She got the demon!" I did, I had captured it. They all looked at the picture, it got quiet. Now I know that this is real.

Conclusion

I write this conclusion nearly nine months after I first scribbled these notes down. Looking back, I see that splitting my fieldwork experiences up into senses served not only as a good memory tool, but now serves as a useful analytical one. For instance, at the time I wrote this, I immediately decided that seeing a fire demon should be filed under the category 'body' as opposed to sight. Upon reflection, this may be because the fire demon is part of firefighting lore, and mythology runs deeper than discourse, seeping into the body and ways of being in the world. Fire demons are both talismans and omens; they tell you that you were safe, but only this time. They mean you survived, but with eyes on your back. With this point of analysis, I can now look at my other notes on the topic, and in places where it came up in formal interviews, and try to draw parallels between this and other symbolic demons. Working with men in prison, talk of demons—past,

present, and future—certainly arises. Analyzing this connection may be productive for my work.

Prior to the Ransom Fire, I had never seen a massive ecological event like this up close. Every fire is different, and this one was not even near the most intense fire these crewmembers have fought. This was manageable. At all times, the experienced guys knew exactly what was happening. They could see it coming, could see where the fire would go, and knew what to do. Yet for the uninitiated, that day felt like I was watching a movie where everyone else had been privy to a pre-screening. Throughout the hours and miles, I relied on the prison crewmembers to repeat the dialogue they had already heard. I relied on them, truly, to survive. I channeled their bodies and their attitude, their wisdom and their strength. In this way, I think I decided to write fieldnotes that were multi-sensed—that were *sensuous*—in order to try and capture this intimate connection between fieldworker and informant. What I saw and heard and felt the day of the Ransom Fire, and every day throughout my 15 months on the line, was both my own and not my own. I was fighting wildfires, but not alone.

> *Fieldwork remolds you. You become plastic, your senses and memories and lives become enmeshed with others. On the fireline, when fieldwork becomes a battle, this is especially true.*

[1] 'On the line' is a wildfire-fighting phrase that means the timeframe when crews are actively fighting fires, rather than being staged in a nearby camp or holding area. Wildland firefighters work shifts up to 16 hours at a time 'on the line' and then have to rest for several hours before being sent back.

[2] All fires have names. Some of the most epic ones go down in the annals of firefighting history, and a person need only reference the first name (like this one, Ransom) to spark a multi-hour recollection between crewmembers of the danger, the strategies, the failures and successes. For this essay and for all of my data,

fire names have been changed to protect anonymity.

[3] Once Incident Command determines the general direction of the main fire, and if the conditions are favorable, crews will be sent to create a 'box' around it. This means they hike several miles in front of where the fire is headed, and using drip torches, burn a box shape back towards the head of the flames. Eventually the fire will reached the burned area, run out of fuel, and slowly extinguish itself.

[4] The most common job a wildland firefighter does is dig lines. Over the length of any fire's edge, between the burned and not-burned area, crews dig a shallow, wide line into the ground (removing fuels, exposing bare soil), so the fire will have a less likely chance to cross to the green vegetation.

[5] A fire, like a human being, has an anatomical chart, replete with a head, heels, flanks, and fingers, to name a few. In this case, the flanks are the sides of the fire, which have to be contained so the fire doesn't get wider and pick up more fuel and heat.

All photos courtesy of Lindsey Feldman

MORAL WAGES: THE EMOTIONAL DILEMMAS OF VICTIMS ADVOCACY AND COUNSELING

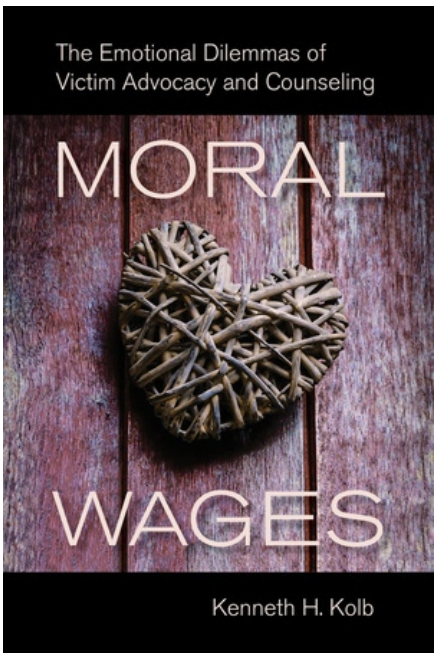
Jana Šimenc
February, 2017

I was excited to dig into the book by the sociologist Kenneth A. Kolb. Why? I was keen to read something analytically powerful, critical and innovative about domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA). Globally, DV and SA remain persistent social and health problems as well as violations of human rights. For the most part, a number of academic and non-academic sources circle around the issues, which include victims' perspectives, cycles in abuse and violence, gender inequality, a variety of multi-sector approaches to recognising and treating

victims and perpetuators of DV and SA and awareness-raising actions. Still, I firmly support the need to put a more critical spotlight on the issue of DV and SA in the academic and research spheres.

> *Kolb has reached beyond the common topics of DV and SA with his work Moral Wages: The Emotional Dilemmas of Victim Advocacy and Counseling.*

This monograph is a much-needed (sociological) narrative about the workplace dilemmas of those who struggle on the front line of DV and SA, yet habitually stay at the margins in the discourse: the advocates and counsellors working and volunteering at agencies/organisations around the globe with the aims of preventing abuse, offering services to victims and perpetrators and making other interventions in cases of DV and SA. As the author states, his book 'is not the first to study battered woman's shelters or victim support agencies . . . but is unique in that it captures how the inner lives (emotional experiences and identity) of those who work there are shaped by wider forces beyond their control' (p. 7).



Kolb begins with the detailed depiction of a staff meeting at Stopping Abuse in Family Environments (SAFE), where budget cuts, excessive workloads and possible work reorganisation were main topics. During the meeting, one of the advocates suddenly began to cry and expressed her feelings of being responsible for a client who had been murdered by her partner (who then turned a gun on himself) a year prior. Through the description of one staff meeting and one (tragic) case in the agency, the reader is given a tangible illustration of the everyday work at SAFE, thereby providing insight into and an indication of the emotional dilemmas faced by advocates and counsellors, as well as victims of DV and SA on a daily basis. These include how to manage workloads that continue to increase in the context of

intense budget cuts (where reducing their services was not an option they considered), how to stay motivated for the task of performing this very demanding 'moral dirty work' (p. 23) despite the low wages and lack of financial benefits, how to bear the constant emotional risks and pressures of helping and supporting the victims, how to cope with feelings of powerlessness, being responsible for clients' deaths or the reoccurrence of returning to abusive relationships (Kolb sees self-blame, guilt and shame as occupational hazards at SAFE), how to follow the agency's central principle of empowerment, how to cope with clients' 'difficult' behaviour (p. 87) and similar issues. All of the questions that Kolb raises are relevant and applicable to other agencies like SAFE.

Kolb introduces the concept of 'moral wages' as an analytic device to answer some of the above-stated dilemmas, where 'the moral wages are not just individual experience, but rather patterned forms of symbolic compensation that are structurally embedded into occupations like victim advocacy and counseling' (p. 50).

> *He also uses the concept 'to offer a different perspective on what factors can impede and enable workers' ability to "feel good" about doing good' (p. 50) and to explain 'how workers with higher and lower incomes make sense of their decisions to put up with less' (p. 50).*

Further, the author analyses service providers' dilemmas arising out of the concept of 'empowerment', a philosophy that is often embedded in non-government organisations (NGOs) policy. It is about 'helping others by offering them the time, resources, and encouragement they need to make their own decisions' (p. 53), in the process of 'regaining strength, courage, confidence and personal power' (p. 54). This is a 'hands-off' guiding practice for treating victims of DV and SA and not 'rescuing', blaming or judging them.

Only in cases of imminent danger do staff members have the permission to intervene and give explicit advice to clients. Empowerment is also an interpretive filter for the evaluation of the work at the agency. However, as Kolb skilfully

demonstrates, in practice, empowering clients is a challenging goal, also provoking work dilemmas and personal doubts. He introduces 'the steering strategies' (p. 71) staff members use as a support tool to 'nudge clients off a potentially hazardous path' (p. 71).

The myth of the 'perfect victim' is another crucial concept he analyses. The myth causes societal misconceptions about DV and SA, but as the author also points out, 'the trope of ideal victims put abused woman in an inescapable double bind' (p. 102). Debunking popular perceptions and myths about victims is a decisive part of SAFE's job. As staff members significantly emphasised, real-life victims of DV and SA are not always the sad and stoic figures portrayed by the media or awareness-raising campaigns (similarly, the image of the aggressive man, the 'perfect perpetrator', is only a myth). Sometimes, staff members must deal with clients who demonstrate so-called 'difficult behaviour'. Kolb gives a detailed portrayal of one such 'difficult client', who repetitively lied, missed sessions, returned to abusive men, spent money that SAFE had given her for living costs and education to buy and sell drugs, argued aggressively with pro-bono lawyers, yelled at officers and so on (see Chapter 4). At this point it is crucial to stress that the actions of not respecting safe house and agency rules/principles endanger victims and staff members and can damage the agency's reputation among the local community and other competent institutions (such as police departments, social work offices, court houses and so on). Yet Kolb carefully elaborates on staff members' dilemmas, how to handle, tolerate, sympathize with, set limits or even refuse the services of the most difficult clients and those who practice risk-enabling bad behaviour.

Further Kolb examines the dilemmas arising out of the criminal justice system. According to Kolb, staff members perceive it with much suspicion; they view arrest warrants and restraining orders with caution, as legal victories might give clients a false sense of security or enrage the woman's abuser or both (see p. 113). In the context of empowerment, they understand the legal system as a potential threat 'to take away clients' "power and control" over their lives' (p. 114). Another concern they express is in regards to the effectiveness, especially of

protective orders. Kolb states that the rhetoric about protective orders as being only a piece of paper is part of a wider, nationwide discourse. The author's auto-ethnographic descriptions of legal work reveal much about the staff members' dilemmas, symbolic meanings, wider social context of dealing with DV and SA and satisfaction arising from the task of accompanying a client to the court house and winning a protective order.

> *One of the central questions throughout the book illuminates that of gender issues;although all people might be affected, women are predominantly the victims, as well as support services staff members (e.g. NGOs, social workers, and so on) for DV and SA victims.*

He talks about the fact that woman are traditionally expected to perform the emotionally demanding work (and professions) of caring for others, such as listening to, comforting, exhibiting compassion, caring for the needs of others, and so on. This 'women work' (p. 138) comes with few symbolic and financial rewards.

As a man, the author was an exception in mainly female workplaces, where women are frequently stereotyped as 'feminazis' (p. 20) or man-haters. As a man who got involved in helping victims of DV and SA, he rapidly earned privileges and merit badges. As he observes, 'countless woman did more for clients than most men (myself included) ever did, yet none of these women ever received the same amount of applause for simply "being there" or "showing interest"' (p. 160). Because the implications of such and similar practices at places like SAFE contribute to the reproduction of gender inequality, Kolb suggests that both institutions and individuals 'stop privileging men' (p. 178).

In the conclusions, the author gives precise advice for modifying and standardising existing practices and putting them into policy. A comprehensive account of fieldwork methods and research strategy is also given at the end (Kolb spent four months in training and volunteering at one agency and later made observations and in-depth interviews at another for fourteen months).

I think that the book's primary strengths are Kolb's straightforward and thick auto-ethnographic descriptions (my admiration might stem from my training as an anthropologist) of his personal journey into the sphere of DV and SA. He vividly illuminates his experiences of entering into the 'women domains' and being slowly integrated into the agency. After he gained the trust of the residents and his co-workers, 'being a man made my research easier', he writes (p. 142). What is important is that through his personal accounts he managed to lucidly portray the social construction of DV and SA, positioning the related problems within the wider contextualisation of gender issues and the process of stereotypisation.

Kolb also proved to be a careful observer, as he skilfully writes about the challenging dilemmas, workloads and emotional hazards individuals face on a daily bases in SAFE. Based on his professional background, he embraces different sociological references and analytical concepts (such as moral wages as a subset of DuBois's term 'psychological wage', steering strategies, moral identity work, sympathy, Goffman's 'cooling out' and others) to put SAFE's work concepts and philosophy into a different perspective and frame of understanding. As much as I found his detour from the dominant contextualisation of DV and SA – that is, the cycle of abuse in violent relationships – one of the innovations in the research, it is also a theoretical framework I missed in a few parts of the book. I am not saying that the cycle of violence is completely left out of the analyses, I would only suggest it is not stressed enough as the fundamental theoretical framework that staff members at NGOs use for the understanding of a victim's (difficult) behaviour. It is also one of the imperative conceptual tools they use for solving several work and emotional dilemmas (such as efficiency, motivation, self-blame, responsibility, and so on).

> *Most importantly, Kolb's research is in many ways an innovative contribution to the studies in DV and SA.*

It might be interpreted as a nuanced praise of everyone who on a daily basis performs the emotionally demanding work of helping others with little (or no)

financial benefits or privileges (I sensed Kolb's sympathy and admiration for the hard work of advocates and counsellors throughout the research). I would definitely recommend the book, even to those outside the professional community interested in DV and AS. Not only are topics like gender inequality, 'women work' and 'moral wages' transferable to many other spheres, but also many will find the monograph stimulating; to a careful reader, it gradually opens up the social and individual complexity of DV and SA. I am referring to a myriad of horizons that are impossible to grasp in the review with a 1500 word limit.

Kolb H. Kenneth. 2014. *Moral Wages. The Emotional Dilemmas of Victim Advocacy and Counseling*. University of California Press. 232 pp. Pb.: $29.95. ISBN: 9780520282728.

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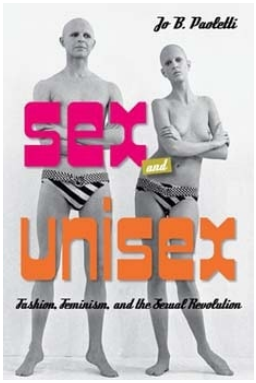
SEX AND UNISEX: FASHION, FEMINISM, AND THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Harriette Richards
February, 2017

Fashion is deeply expressive of social and individual identities, and thus, changes in fashion trends reveal much about changes in culture. This contention is a familiar one within fashion studies. It is also the premise upon which Jo B. Paoletti presents *Sex and Unisex: Fashion, Feminism and the Sexual Revolution*, an interdisciplinary examination of the changes in understandings of sexual and gender identity in America during the 1960s and 1970s by way of an historical exploration of the provocative unisex fashion trends of the era. Paoletti's text is

admirable in that it considers a largely unexplored period in American fashion history and therefore provides an original and valuable contribution to the literature. However, while the text employs a well-established methodological fashion studies approach and engages with profoundly interesting subject matter, it is also disappointingly – and ironically, given its focus – out of touch with the fashion studies cannon.

> *Paoletti's key focus, as she points out in the introduction, is to attend to the 'unfinished business of the sexual revolution' (p.14).*



This 'unfinished business' is approached through a clearly structured examination of the interconnections between dress and politics and the consequences of such interconnections for the construction of gender and sexual identity. By combining a study of fashion trends with an exploration of the civil rights movement and concurrent trends in the fields of behaviour science, biology and the social sciences, Paoletti not only examines the implications of trends in unisex clothing during the 1960s and 1970s but also positions them as indicative of ongoing culture wars and continued political debates concerning issues of sexuality and gender. Indeed, Paoletti argues that the conflicts of this era expose inherent 'flaws in our notions of sex, gender and sexuality' (p.8), flaws that continue to persist due to the fact that the questions raised by the sexual revolution remain to be satisfactorily answered.

While Paoletti begins the text with a self-reflexive moment, in which she outlines her own relationship to gender and fashion, she quickly assures the reader that, far from being a memoir based on her own 'frail memory' (p.8), the text draws on the fields of dress history, public policy and the science of gender in order to illustrate the arguments. In addition, it uses mass-market catalogs, newspaper and magazine articles, and trade publications as a source of primary data that acts as evidence of trends in unisex fashion. The six chapters of the book each

examine a different element of the unisex movement – starting with a chapter exploring the influence of the 'baby boomers' on American culture, and progressing through chapters considering womenswear and second wave feminism, menswear and the so-called 'Peacock Revolution,' children's clothes and changing perceptions of nature verses nurture, the litigation of the revolution and bringing fashion into the courtroom, and a concluding chapter examining the implications of this period in relation to contemporary identity politics – yet they all address the same underlying questions concerning how trends in unisex clothing can reveal conflicts concerning sex, sexuality and gender stereotypes

> *One of the central arguments throughout the text concerns the relationship between masculinity and femininity, specifically how this relationship influences what happens when one or another of these determinations drastically changes.*

Where Paoletti's arguments are at their strongest is in her chapters concerning trends in children's clothing (based on the work of her 2012 book *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America*), and the litigation of fashion trends, particularly the length of boys' hair and girls' skirts. As Paoletti rightly notes, there is a significant absence of scholarship on the subject of children's clothing, and the implications of trends in childrenswear for conceptions of gender and sexual identity. There is also little scholarship on the subject of fashion litigation, despite the fact that the subject has the potential to reveal much about identity politics and the legislation of appearance. Accordingly, Paoletti's chapters on both subjects are particularly fascinating. The strength of these chapters is also enhanced by the critical evidential illustration that is frequently lacking elsewhere in the text.

> *The themes with which Paoletti engages are important, the arguments she posits are provokingly posed, and there is sufficient contemporary relevance to render the work revealing and meaningful.*

However, at times the contentions advanced appear shallow or even superficial due to the clichéd nature of numerous claims that lack nuanced engagement with the critical literature. When she notes that ‘miniskirts rose inch by inch, and school dress codes followed them, resignedly’ (p.30), or that neckties have ‘been a feature of women’s fashion for centuries’ (p.51), or that the ‘peacock “revolution” was turning into a civil war’ (p.76), the generalised nature of her statements, lacking evidential support, undermines the rigor of the work and tends to diminish the strength of Paoletti’s arguments. While the text includes numerous case studies that eloquently illustrate and support Paoletti’s contentions (particularly in chapters four and five), they are interspersed with generalised and unsubstantiated assertions that question whether Paoletti has succeeded in producing a text that avoids ‘oversimplification or confusion’ (p.14).

Further, while the book deals with the subject of fashion deeply and sincerely, it lacks critical engagement with fashion theory, engagement that could have further extended the scope of the research. As a fashion scholar reading a text in which ‘Fashion’ features in the title, it was surprising to note the lack of fashion scholars referenced. Indeed, even the most well-known fashion scholar, Elizabeth Wilson, is not mentioned, despite the fact that her seminal text *Adorned in Dreams* (1985) includes chapters on both ‘Gender and Identity’ and ‘Oppositional Dress.’ Wilson is not, however, the only scholar to discuss androgynous, unisex fashions, and the ways in which changes in dress trends reflect social and cultural changes. Rather, these are common themes in scholarly fashion literature. Thus, while Paoletti’s book is a timely reading of an interesting and influential period in recent American history, her arguments would have benefitted greatly from critical engagement with the work of fashion scholars whose work has also considered the subjects with which she is concerned.

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MASCULINITIES UNDER NEOLIBERALISM

Magdalena Suerbaum
February, 2017

Masculinities Under Neoliberalism (2016), edited by Andrea Cornwall, Frank G. Karioris and Nancy Lindisfarne is the successor of the groundbreaking work 'Dislocating Masculinity' (1994). Twenty years after its publication the foundation stone for *Masculinities Under Neoliberalism* was laid when the authors invited scholars working on masculinity to the symposium 'Dislocating Masculinity Revisited' (2014) with the purpose to discuss developments in the field of masculinity studies.

The central aim of this volume is “to locate masculinities in the plural and to dislocate the naturalization of privilege” (Cornwall et al. 2016: xxvi). It seeks to analyse the hazards of neoliberalism globally, locally, and in the everyday lives of men in different social and cultural contexts (Cornwall 2016: 24). With its seventeen chapters written by scholars at various stages of their career and trained in diverse disciplines, such as sociology, social anthropology, area studies and media studies, this volume offers a bouquet of case studies, approaches, and contentions – all revolving around men’s everyday realities. This book not only introduces the reader to a range of geographical locations, but also deals with various thematic foci, such as the persistence of traditional demands made on men, the endurance of gendered, colonial stereotypes, and men’s engagement in and suffering from ‘othering’ processes based on race, class or religion.

> *This book has a useful preface and introduction that draws connections between the two publications, the authors’ intentions, and guides the reader through the development of relevant scholarship in the last twenty years.*

A theoretical chapter follows the introduction, in which Nancy Lindisfarne and Jonathan Neale lay out how gender, class and neoliberalism intersect and interdepend, provided with an overview on the development of neoliberalism, and suggests how to approach the study of gender and neoliberalism methodologically. They argue that neoliberal processes work through the interplay of the naturalisation of inequality, increased gendered marking and the creation of a greater distance between the elite and ordinary people. Admittedly, an analysis on a meta level always risks being essentialising to an extent and difficult to apply to the reality on the ground. In this book, however, the following chapters fill this gap by illustrating, affirming and advancing Lindisfarne and Neale’s analysis through the case studies presented.

What is inherent to all the contributions is their thorough grounding in ethnographic research and its combination of the individual's experiences with the broader themes of global neoliberal trends. The majority of the chapters focus on men who are positioned at the lower end of the socioeconomic hierarchy due to their working class background, caste, rural origin, immigrant status or belonging to the ethnic minority in the respective society under study.

A major input of this volume is that it manages to highlight men's struggle to constantly prove, sustain, and defend their position as men. The family, the state, women, and other men continuously challenge one's manhood, either in an obvious and blunt way or in an indirect and subversive manner. Furthermore, this volume shows that being a man is not always advantageous and does not always guarantee a dominant position in society. Instead, men are described in several chapters as being confronted with a traditional, ideal version of masculinity that they cannot adhere to because of constraints of current labour market factors. The struggle to realise traditional values and to conform to what is expected of a man is very well illustrated in Xiaodong Lin's piece on migrant workers in urban China and their struggle to become sons in the traditionally accepted sense.

Furthermore, this volume stands out because each case study is thoroughly contextualised historically, often referring to colonial legacies and stereotypes showing how they still impact on present-day constructions of and discourses around masculinity. In this context, it is worth mentioning Jane Bristol-Rhys and Caroline Osella's contribution, which juxtaposes how Emirati men manage to neuter migrant men discursively, while Indian men who work as migrants in the Emirates define their own version of successful masculinity against the foil of the impatient, impulsive and immature Emirati man. The process of 'othering' does not only emerge as an important theme in Bristol-Rhys and Osella's chapter, but also Mairtin Mac an Ghaill and Chris Haywood's work deals with the nuanced reflections of British Muslim young men on stereotypes and discourses that define them as a security threat or as religious fundamentalists. Moreover, their piece is outstanding because of the space it grants to the interlocutors' own voices, opinions and the meanings they ascribe to the term Muslim.

How masculinities are negotiated vis-à-vis women is an implicit part of every chapter, but is put to the forefront in Penny Vera-Sanso's case study on men's changing role during their life cycle in South India. Because of age discrimination in the labour market, women, who are often younger than their husbands, become the main providers of the families while men transform into feminised recipients of support and experience subordination as a consequence.

> *Another strength of this book lies in the fact that it pays attention to men's feelings and emotional ambiguities.*

In this context, a remarkable contribution is Joe Hayns' analysis of Moroccan working class men's vulnerability and the shame, grief and bitterness related to their position as orientalised, sexual objects of desire by European tourists. Hayns illustrates how the strategies to masculinise in a traditional sense by accumulating financial means in order to become a provider are emasculating, if provider masculinity is only reachable through young men's financial dependence on (sexual) relationships with tourists. Another outstanding contribution that pays nuanced attention to men's emotions is Carmen McLeod's study of duck hunters in New Zealand. These men express feelings of "boyish excitement" (McLeod 2016: 231) before the beginning of the hunting season, and show deep love and admiration for their dogs, the ducks they hunt, and their natural habitat.

Several chapters of this volume focus on homosocial spaces and encounters, illustrating the dynamics that develop in an all-male space. Frank Karioris highlights in his work how adolescent boys living in an all-male university hall in the US struggle to situate themselves within their marginal position on campus, while simultaneously being judged, defined, and "placed by others" (Karioris 2016: 258). Rachel O'Neill's work on London's seduction community takes in focus the competitive and comparative character of homosocial environments by showing how ridicule, which a man can expect if he fails to prove his manhood in front of others, becomes a driving force to engage in seduction courses. In these courses, women are objectified, mainly used as a currency to boost men's

standing, and are often unknowingly turned into an object lesson by the seduction Coaches.

> *Another overriding theme is the question of how new forms of consumption impact on constructions of masculinity.*

Charlie Walker describes how expensive clothes and accessories are perceived to confirm a Russian man's rationality and leadership. In contrast, he shows how the material marginalisation of Russian working class men undermines their subjective wellbeing. Luisa Enria discusses in her profound contribution on young men's association with violence in Sierra Leone how the inability to provide for a partner with material subsistence translates into men stepping back from relationships trying to evade the humiliation of being abandoned because of their incapability to be "gatekeepers to women's consumption" (Enria 2016: 144).

Due to the sheer number of chapters and variety of foci and geographic locations, this volume sometimes leaves the leader wishing for further information about the context or in-depth analysis of aspects and details that are only briefly touched upon. While a bouquet of case studies from all over the world can make a powerful and plausible argument about neoliberalism and masculinity, it does not provide the contributors with space to lay out their argument in great detail. Based on this difficulty, some chapters lack an explicit discussion of the actual meaning and form of neoliberal constraints in the respective case under study.

Moreover, Raewyn Connell's work on hegemonic masculinity is sometimes taken for granted without further questioning its applicability and usefulness. Categories like 'hegemonic' or 'subordinate' masculinities are occasionally applied without a thorough deconstruction of these terms and a nuanced discussion of why they fit to the context discussed. In my opinion, masculinity is more often than not deeply fragmented, ambivalent and contradictory, which undermines the possibility to apply the simple binary of 'hegemonic' and 'subordinate' masculinities without thorough questioning and analysis.

All in all, *Masculinities under Neoliberalism* stands out because of its rich case studies and its timely focus on how masculinities are subject to change in a neoliberal system. Furthermore, each contribution is a homage to comparative ethnography and proves the importance and relevance of in-depth ethnographic research for the conceptualisation and theorisation of manhood. It manages to bring together various ways in which neoliberalism impacts on men's lives – as a philosophy, fantasy, fanatic focus on consumption, as precarity in the labour market, in the form of increasing individualisation and the selling of one's bodily capital.

Cornwall, Andrea; Karioris G. Franj; Lindsifarne, Nansy. 2016. *Masculinities under Neoliberalism*. The University of Chicago Press. 225 pp. Pb.: $28.95. ISBN: 978-1783607662.

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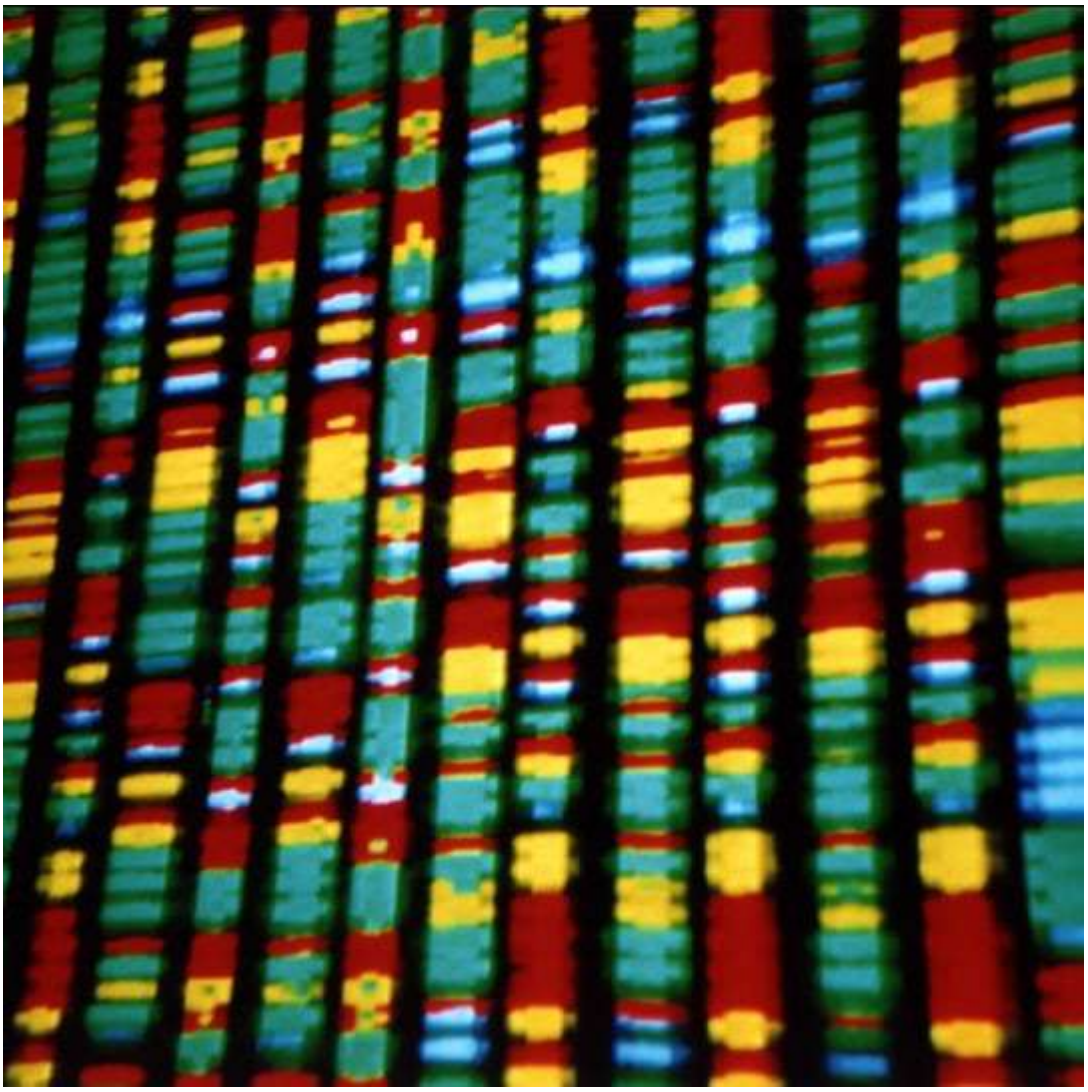
GENDER AND GENETICS:

SOCIOLOGY OF THE PRENATAL

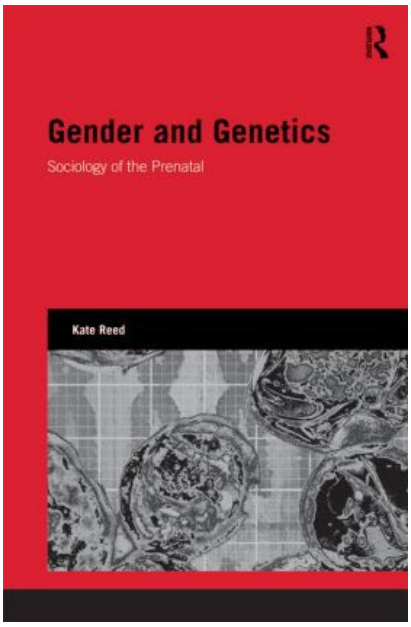
Elizabeth Holdsworth
February, 2017



Within the past several years, prenatal testing has significantly advanced, developing numerous methods of non-invasive prenatal testing such as examining fetal cell-free DNA in maternal blood. These methods permit the identification of chromosomal disorders such as Down's syndrome as well as blood disorders such as sickle-cell and thalassemia. Advances in prenatal screening technologies have prompted critical analysis of many facets of reproduction, pregnancy, and the interaction of human biology and culture. These advances are occurring alongside

significant changes in gender ideology relating to reproduction, particularly the role of men in relationships and fatherhood. This "new fatherhood" emphasizes greater involvement in reproduction, particularly the care and nurturing of children. It serves as a complement to the new "companionate" relationship, a reimagining of partnerships and marriage as a relationship of friendship and romance (Hirsch and Wardlow 2006). It is in this context of a reimagining of reproductive gender ideology and advances in prenatal screening technology that *Gender and Genetics: Sociology of the Prenatal* demonstrates how men's more active involvement in prenatal care and screening reflects gender ideologies of reproduction, through gendered interpretations of visual and blood screening and genetic responsibility.

Dr. Kate Reed uses a sociological approach of structured interviews of 22 pregnant women and 16 of their male partners in the United Kingdom to elucidate how parents' decisions and reactions to prenatal screening both reinforce and contradict traditional gender ideology. Reed predominantly uses the model of traditional gendered reproduction presented by Rothman (1986) as the ideology that is simultaneously contradicted or reinforced.



> *This model presents the role of men in reproduction as providing a "seed" of reproduction, while women are the "soil."*

This traditional gender role ideology of reproduction therefore presents men and women with difficult challenges to conceptions of "new fatherhood" as well as women's bodily autonomy.

One of the predominant themes that emerge from the interviews is how this

traditional gender ideology is reinforced through prenatal screening. In Chapter 1, *Information keeping/seeking*, despite men's interest in independently seeking out information, both partners ultimately viewed women as possessing authoritative knowledge and power over the pregnancy. The institutional constraints on men's attendance at prenatal appointments (i.e. difficulty getting time off from work) further reinforces the traditional ideology as men being uninvolved in the nurturing and developing aspects of reproduction, namely pregnancy (Chapter 2, *Gender, choice and time*). This serves to reinforce the biological deterministic ideology of men's association with paid work and women's association with reproduction. Men's involvement in prenatal appointments emphasize their relationship to the fetus, as evidenced by the focus on ultrasound appointments that allow men to connect visually and aurally to their offspring, while other appointments more associated with the process of pregnancy or health of the fetus are viewed as the realm of women, such as blood screening (Chapter 3, *Imaging and imagining genetics*). The association of women with pregnancy and men with genetic contribution is further upheld through the predominant concerns of women with the health of the fetus and pregnancy and men's concerns with the positive manifestation of their genes (Chapter 5, *Gendering 'good' and 'bad' genes*).

The involvement of male partners in prenatal care further upholds traditional gender ideology to accommodate women's bodily autonomy, as described in Chapter 4 (*Men, masculinity and decision-making*). This necessarily upholds the biological deterministic perspective of reproduction and pregnancy as the realm of women. Throughout the interviews on prenatal care and screening decisions, men expressed their interest in involvement in the pregnancy, but also expressed their intent to defer to women's ultimate authority in decision-making. Deference to women's authority is justified with women's bodily autonomy, which serves to orient pregnancy and fetal health as the ultimate responsibility of women.

> *This delicate balance of the "new father's" involvement in prenatal care with women's bodily autonomy reinforces the secondary role of men in reproduction and child-rearing, at least during pregnancy.*

However, this traditional gender ideology, particularly men's roles in pregnancy and prenatal screening, is necessarily reimagined or discarded to fit men's ideas of the "new fatherhood". Men independently seeking information about prenatal care and screening through the internet exemplifies a new ideology of fatherhood continuing through pregnancy, not merely taking place after birth (Chapter 1, *Information keeping/seeking*). This is most clearly seen in men consistently expressing desire to be involved in the pregnancy of their partners and women's encouragement of such involvement. In particular, the ultrasound appointment to visually and aurally connect to the fetus was a moment of becoming biological and social fathers for most men, permitting a break from the traditional gender ideology of fatherhood being constrained to insemination and care after birth (Chapter 3, *Imaging and imagining genetics*). This appointment was viewed as important for men to attend by both men and women, acknowledging the role it plays in constructing feelings of direct connection to the developing fetus without the woman's interpretation and mediation. Additionally, men sought information and support from their social networks of fathers and fathers-to-be to help inform and guide them in their development as fathers during the prenatal period (Chapter 6, *Family, friends and heredity*).

Reed also explores how perceptions of race and experiences of class influence approaches to and interpretations of prenatal screening, devoting much of Chapter 7, *Transforming social divisions,* to the topic. Though conclusions are limited by the small sample size, particularly the overrepresentation of white participants, patterns of class and the racialization of blood disorders screening emerge. Social, economic, and cultural capital influence knowledge of and access to some screening procedures as well as the option for men to take time off work for attendance at prenatal appointments. Screening for blood disorders is racialized among white participants – "whiteness" is viewed as a protection against blood disorders, given the higher prevalence of disorders like sickle-cell and thalassemia in populations identified as "non-white." This exploration of class and racialization in prenatal screening is preliminary, but raises important questions as to how prenatal screening technology can contribute to social

inequality based on genetic capital.

> *Gender and Genetics is an innovative analysis of the relationship between gender ideology and prenatal screening.*

Dr. Reed highlights how traditional gender ideology can be reinforced by the experience of prenatal screening through an association of male genes with "good" or positive genes and through the continued association of women as the nurturers and incubators of developing fetuses. This is particularly interesting in genetic screening given the equal genetic contribution to the developing fetus. Identifying how the conception of fatherhood as nurturing can be reconciled with the biological realities of pregnancy is an ongoing theme in this study. Additionally, reconciling men's desire to be partners and companions to their significant others with the imperative of women's bodily autonomy (reinforced by medical practices as well) is a prominent area of tension in navigating gender ideology in the prenatal period.

The research does not delve into how these ideologies are reinforced or contradicted by medical practitioners or institutional policies and practices beyond the interpretation and reports of the respondents. This will be an important area of further research, as many respondents noted a desire for men to be more involved in reproduction in the prenatal period, identifying medical information geared towards men as a means to encouragement more involvement. As such, generalizability is limited. However, this work provides a wealth of information for further exploration into how gender ideology in prenatal care, particularly genetic screening, can be shaped by factors such as medical practices and policies, national and corporate practices and policies regarding parental leave, class, ethnicity, and social networks.

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Reed, K. 2012. *Gender and Genetics: Sociology of the Prenatal.* London: Routledge. 198 pp. Pb: £34.99. ISBN: 978-1-138-82289-4.

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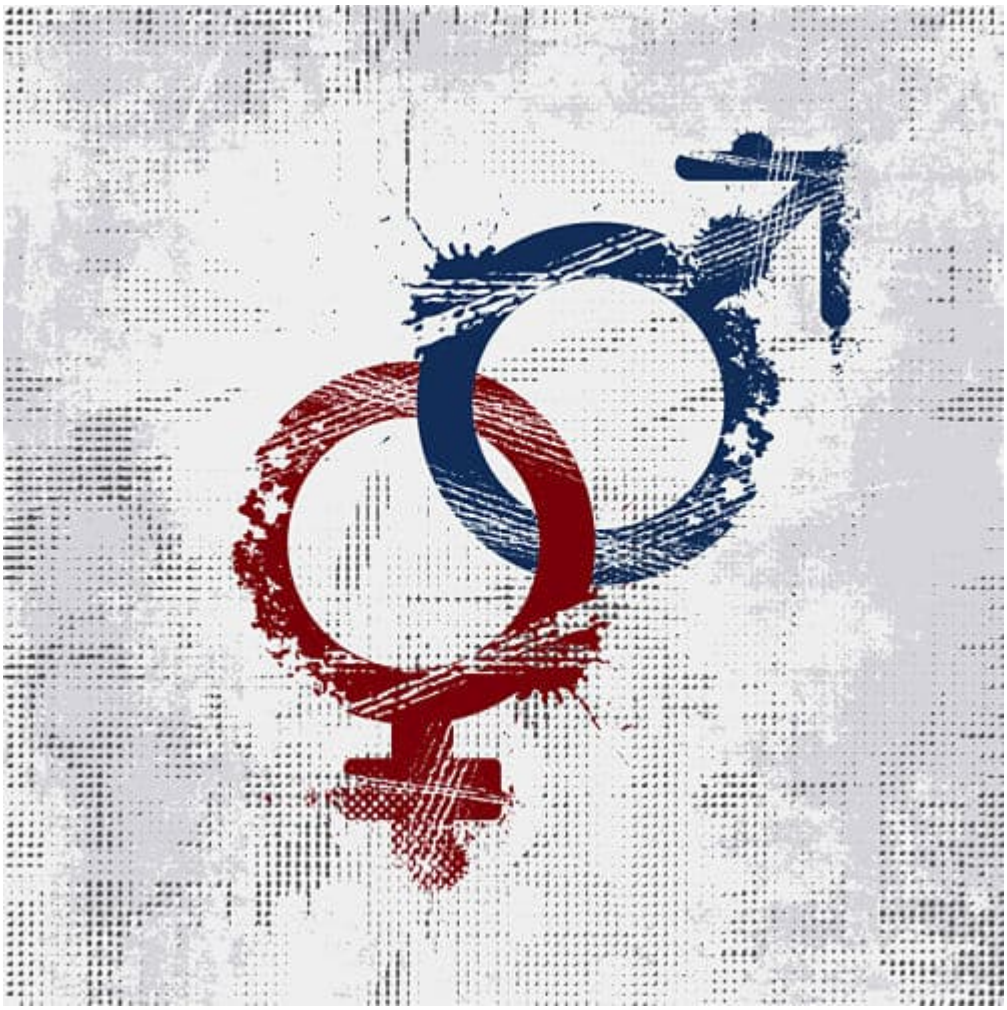
Reviews week: Let's talk about gender!

Judith Beyer
February, 2017



Following up on Felix Girke's review of Rogers Brubaker's book #trans, this #reviews week is dedicated to more new publications that explore #gender at the intersection of a range of topics: genetics, neoliberalism, violence, and fashion. All four books were part of our call for reviews on #gender.

We start tomorrow with a review by Elizabeth Holdsworth. She explores Kate Reed's breathtaking study on *Gender and Genetics. Sociology of the Prenatal*. In her book, Reed explores how traditional gender ideology is enforced through prenatal screening technology.

On Wednesday, Magdalena Suerbaum reviews *Masculinities under Neoliberalism*, a volume edited by Andrea Cornwall, Frank Karioris, and Nancy Lindisfarne that explores how neoliberalism is transforming gender in general and masculinity in particular.

On Thursday, Harriette Richards discusses Jo B. Paoletti's *Sex and Unisex. Fashion, Feminism and the Sexual Revolution*, exploring the interconnections between clothes and politics and the consequences of such interconnections for the construction of gender and sexual identity.

On Friday, we take a look at *Moral Wages: The Emotional Dilemmas of Victim Advocacy and Counseling* by Kenneth H. Kolb. As a male ethnographer, Kolb enters a field in which women are seeking help from male violence. The book is certainly not the first to study battered woman's shelters or victim support agencies, but our reviewer, Jana Šimenc, applauds Kolb for a straightforward auto-ethnographic account and a careful positioning of domestic violence and sexual assault within the wider contextualisation of gender issues.

Buenos Aires Subway Soundtrack

Ingo Rohrer
February, 2017

https://soundcloud.com/audioanthro/subtesounds

The city rattles, rustles and roars unremittingly. In Buenos Aires you hear the constant medley of restless mechanical noises and the humming of millions of lives. The central pitch of this soundscape is the overflowing traffic of the metropolis. As an anthropologist working in the capital of Argentina, I rely on public transport with its shrieking buses, clattering subways and rumbling trains. During my ethnographic fieldwork on the construction of trust in the realm of criminal courts, I spend countless hours traveling across town to my meetings with lawyers, judges, secretaries, academics, activists, and other actors in the field of criminal justice. To escape the boredom of these long rides I started to pay attention to the plethora of musicians who present their repertoire in subway wagons and stops. A multitude of talented, and not so talented, artists stray

through the city and interrupt the boring traveling routine of the passengers with their songs, who in case they like what they hear, reward the musicians with a small donation.

> *On my travels through the city, I became intrigued by how the songs of the artists merge with the mechanic sounds of the traffic, how the noises of machines, the monotonous computer voices and the rhythms of the city blend with these performances in unpredicted and coincidental ways.*

The murmur of the trains, the screaming breaks, the rough rumble of closing doors, alarm signals, the neutral voices of recorded announcements and all those further sounds of the technical instruments compose such a common background that one tends to fade out these noises and to concentrate on the music performed by humans only. With this compilation of recordings, I made during my travels, I invite the listener to take notice of this interplay and to realize that the combination of music and machinery, creates a very particular soundscape: the acoustics of the urban.

The different genres, styles and songs, which already themselves evoke particular images and stereotypes, interplay in very unique ways with the surrounding technical soundscape. While the beat-boxing and rapping appear to match with the imagery of urban coolness, the panpipe songs of Andean Argentina, on the other hand, seem to stand in sharper contrast to the roar of the city. The different compositions of technical noises and varying musical genres allow individual interpretations that are undoubtedly linked to the emotions that are transported through the music and which respond and relate to the sentiment of the metropolis. However, I have the suspicion that both, the artists and their audience, often lose track of this particular correlation between music and the urban sound. People are so used to the noises of the city, that they blend out the machinery and that in the end silence is more irritating to them than the constant din. The noise is pushed into the sphere of the unnoticed, the unconscious.

Everyone interested in music, however, is aware that the emotional effect of

music changes due to its context. This is very apparent if one recalls the difference of listening to a piano piece in a festive concert hall, or in a smoky bar.

> *For me, these recordings from Argentinian public transport beg the question of how the emotional content of music and the emotional reaction of the audience to the music is altered by a context that is less obvious or even subconscious.*

Does the sound of machines intensify certain emotions? Does it fit better with particular styles and songs? Would the emotional reaction change if people would be more aware of the orchestra of machines? Could the interplay be used to create new forms of musical styles?

The recordings compiled here invite one to think about these and further questions. Furthermore, they serve as a reminder to also pay attention to other 'background noises' one tends to overlook or overhear in the daily routines. I think that it's worth paying attention to the influence of the 'self-evident' and the 'commonplace' of how people perceive and feel about the world they are moving in and to constantly ask ourselves which kind of 'naturalness' dominates our own perceptions.

Forgotten Refugees at the Tunisian Border with Libya #MeadCompetition

Marta Scaglioni
February, 2017

My forefathers were born to slavery, they worked their skin out of them. We are born to suffer.

In spite of the wide-spread European alarmism on the subject of the so-called "invasion of refugees" , the highest political and economic price for the refugees' humanitarian crisis is being paid by non-European countries in the MENA region – targets of the "externalization of the EU-border" – which have been delegated the execution of procedures for managing migrant flows and assessing UNHCR refugee status, notwithstanding the constant human rights violations these countries perpetrate.

In the remotest part of Tunisia, the "garden of Europe", in the middle of the desert, dozens of threadbare UNHCR tents signal the presence of the remains of

a refugee camp. No running water, intermittent electricity, the only facilities left to around fifty sub-Saharans, former asylum-seekers, are a small café and three self-run places of worship. Refugees survive by means of small trading activities on the borders with Libya and begging on the main street for food and water, under a blinding, blazing sun.

“On the 20th March 2011 I entered Tunisia. When France started bombing Libya,” says a 30-year-old Somali, holding only good-for-nothing UNHCR refugee status. All the refugees had been previously working in Libya, and had to escape after the conflict broke out. According to the Migration Policy Centre, Libyan unrests beginning in 2011 caused a huge flow of migrants to North African countries, with sub-Saharans most at risk. The unrests triggered a humanitarian crisis in Tunisia, a country unprepared to welcome migrants either at an institutional or a local level.

Libya: it is not a country, it is a stress!

After a series of uprisings were triggered in many Arab countries by the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi on 17th December 2010, insurrection against the former President of Libya, Muammar Qaddafi, also exploded in Libya, accompanied by the quest for a new redistributive logic for oil revenues and the dismantlement of a totally one-party system. In the short run, the conflict escalated into a civil war, exacerbated by the international military intervention of the UN and NATO, which culminated in the UN Resolution 1973, in the subsequent imposition of a no-flying zone, and in the capture and assassination of Gaddafi on 20th October, 2011 .

> *The Libyan crisis of 2011 had severe consequences for international migration movements.*

Due to its dynamic economic growth (6% per annum), Libya has been attracting

migrants since as early as the 1960s, when the discovery of oil and hydrocarbons attracted cheap manpower from neighboring Arab countries (Tunisia and Egypt) and sub-Saharans through the "Libyan migration corridor", that is, the transit zone through the Sahara used by illegal sub-Saharan migrants to reach Southern Libya.

"I will turn Europe Black!" threatened Gaddafi during his harshly criticized visit to Rome, in August 2010. Gaddafi's policy of hosting or expelling foreign workers in order to influence diplomatic relationships with Arab, sub-Saharan, and European neighbors had been one of the key instruments of Libyan foreign policy since the 1970s; it had meant that Gaddafi was able to emphasize his key role in controlling illegal migration, in spite of data which showed that migrants tended to stay in Libya rather than embark on a highly treacherous journey. Nonetheless, the Colonel was consistent in presenting his country as a place to pass through, rather than a destination.

> *But why were these high numbers of sub-Saharans registered in the country at the outburst of the conflict?*

The reason has to be traced to Gaddafi's Pan-Africanism or "open door policy", launched to counterbalance the consequences of the economic slowdown of the 90s. Deeply disappointed by the lack of support from Arab countries during the international embargo years (1992-1999) and by the failure of his Pan-Arab projects, Gaddafi promoted Pan-African policies, leading to a rapid increase in the number of sub-Saharans in the country. The open door policy did not solely involve the legal framework, but was also embodied in billboards promoting African unity, TV programs subtitled in French, the broader agenda of the Libyan national airline company, and Gaddafi's speeches inviting sub-Saharans to work in Libya. Nonetheless, life for migrants in Libya was far from idyllic and their time in the country remained highly precarious and subject to arbitrary decisions by the Libyan police. Meanwhile, differentiating between regular and irregular migrants became an arduous task for the Libyan authorities. Most migrants were

not registered once they entered Libya, or were regularized a posteriori, when they applied for health insurance cards. Karim, a 37-year-old from Ghana, lived in Tripoli under the constant threat of expulsion and harassment:

They come to collect everything from you. They come and ask you the documents; they call it "iqāmah" (a long-term visa for a foreign national; in the Libyan case, it consists in a stamp in the foreigner's passport). This is just how they are doing to Blacks. Even if you have an iqāmah you're not safe. The police rips it off from your passport and ask you where is your iqāmah? And then I am taken to prison without iqāmah. Libya: it's not a country, it's a stress.

Gaddafi's national agenda was therefore hindered by practical problems at the frontiers, where military authorities were unprepared to welcome migrants, and where abuses, corruption, and arbitrary arrests were practiced daily. Moreover, migrants were employed mostly as unskilled workers and became the targets of violent attacks, culminating in actual "Black-bashings" like the ones in Tripoli in October, 2000.

The Crisis of 2011

Calculating how many migrants used to live in Libya before the war is a hard task: Libyan authorities provided the European Commission with an estimate of around 600,000 regular and between 750,000 and 1.2 million irregulars. On the whole, migrants fleeing from Libya targeted Tunisia (44.9%) and Egypt (31.6%), two countries already suffering the post-revolutionary economic slowdown, as well as Niger and Chad. Therefore, despite media-spread European alarmism, in 2011 only 3.6% of migrants fleeing the war reached Italy and Malta, benefiting from the collapse of coastal monitoring and the consistent decrease in the cost of rubber-dinghy passage.

> *Sub-Saharans flew from Libya in masses; they paid the highest price for the warfare.*

The numbers of the targeted killings of “Africans”, as they are called by the Libyan population, were not precisely recorded. A side-effect of the 2011 uprising was the individuation of a “racial scapegoat”, and the “creation of the myth of the sub-Saharan mercenaries”: “If you don’t run away, you die. On the street they would say, ‘they are killing Black people because they are mercenaries’. I do not know, there were some people fighting for Gaddafi, but I was definitely not among them”.

Additionally, part of the “Colonel’s blackmailing” consisted in letting hundreds of migrants leave the Libyan coasts as a retaliation against the 2011 NATO attack. “I was the only one not paying the boat. One day some officials picked me up from work and brought me to the coast. They pushed me on a boat with rifles and I had to leave. The boat shipwrecked and I found myself in Tunisia”.

> *An Italian official report in 2011 stated: “It was Gaddafi who sent foreigners to Lampedusa!”*

Choucha

On February 24th, 2011, the refugee camp of Choucha was created seven kilometers from the frontier outpost of Ras Jedir and twenty-five kilometers from the next village, Ben Gardene, on a low-lying plain called Jaffara, in the Governorate of Medenine. The camp was not the only one established during the peak of the Libyan refugees’ crisis: Remada, El Hayet, and Tataouine camps are nowadays all closed but have, like Choucha, hosted Sub-Saharans, Palestinians, Libyans, and Syrians fleeing violence and harassment and seeking to start the procedure to apply for the refugee status. Whereas Arab refugees left the camp very soon and were hosted by Tunisian households, 115,516 sub-Saharans profited from the procedures offered by the IOM and safely returned to their countries of origin.

The camp was initially provided with running water, cafes, electricity, language courses, and other facilities, when thousands of refugees were still hosted there.

After its official closure in 2013 following the rejection of the refugees' asylum request, however, only the military remained to patrol the border, while the provision of food and water had been stopped by the UNHCR in October 2012. Currently around fifty people live in Choucha without running water and electricity, begging for subsistence on the main street heading to Libya.

The location of Choucha in the Governorate of Medenine already demonstrates the goal of hiding refugees from the world's eyes.

In the middle of the desert, closer to Libya than Tunisia, the possibilities of integrating refugees into Tunisia's society appear very slim. Refugees, in Choucha or elsewhere, experience a loss of a geographical place, which does not only refer to their physical or institutional position but also to their loss of identity, relationships, and place-anchored memory. The very position of Choucha, in the middle of the desert, creates a situation of liminality, distance, anticipation, and a sort of quarantine which is even justified by invoking hygiene. Hysteria regarding possible epidemics and hygiene risks in the camps is rife among neighboring villages and the local police force, who often avoid the place because of "Ebola, aggressiveness, diseases". The risk of epidemics, highlighted by Tunisian authorities and civil society, shapes the politics of space and the prophylactic function of the camp itself.

The frontier is already a site of contamination, pollution, and impurity due to the presence of culturally different populations, and bio-segregation is a wide-spread policy going back to racial thinking and stigmatization in the 19th century.

At a local level, the Southern Tunisian population was scarcely prepared to

welcome migrants and accept the camp's presence, and several accidents occurred. The village of Ben Gardene has a traditional population of about 80,000 people and they subsist on pastoralism and trafficking across the border, both legal and illegal. In May 2011 and March 2012, according to the news, Choucha camp was set on fire by inhabitants of Ben Guardene and some deaths occurred.

The church was also burnt down after some clashes erupted in the camp among asylum seekers, after "people in charge of the camp divided us according to nationality and created tension among us". The road heading towards Libya is entangled in the illegal economy of smuggling, and the presence of refugees is a hindrance both to illegal trafficking and to police patrolling of the border. After the second big terrorist attack in Tunisia, in June 2016, a clampdown on smuggling from Libya was enforced, and the Garde Nationale was encouraged to use any means possible to cut down on the importation of weapons, even if that meant shooting a few feet off the ground, putting the refugees' lives at considerable risk.

> *At the time of my fieldwork, in spring 2015, nearly 70 people occupied the former Choucha camp, living in a legal vacuum, and with limited social, economic, and psychological resources.*

Nonetheless, the refugees' human identity, deconstructed institutionally, was reaffirmed by the subjects themselves, who collectively organized their daily lives and engaged in an embryonic, yet sustained political mobilization, forging contacts with European advocacy groups and institutional subjects. After Choucha refugees organized a blog ("Voice of Choucha") and demonstrated in Tunis, and during the World Social Forum in March 2015, many of them were subjected to arbitrary arrests and deported at the Algerian border with "a bottle of water, a baguette, and intimidated not to come back to Tunisia any longer". Tunisia does not have an asylum law yet, despite the fact that a preliminary bill has already been drafted and is currently held by the Ministry of Justice. In practice, even asylum seekers holding refugee status from UNHCR Tunisia are

rendered illegal by Tunisian authorities, and considered as unauthorized migrants living in the country. Hence, asylum seekers and statutory refugees are often arrested in the street and detained in Whardia, a prison mostly for foreigners, on the periphery of Tunis. Whardia is run by the Tunisian Garde Nationale and is not regulated by any jurisdiction. Usually, people are imprisoned and detained without any validation of such a decision by the court. Tunisian authorities are not willing to communicate numbers, nationalities, or other information about the detainees.

> *Despite the constant violation of human rights that the refugees experience, those still residing in Choucha managed to recreate everyday life out of the state of anomie they were caught in.*

Still living illegally on Tunisian territory, some of them engaged in artistic activities, getting in touch with Tunisian associations and thus making a living out of it, and others organized their life in Choucha by profiting from the scarce available resources. Choucha has a mosque and a church, along with minor devotional centers, and refugees (mainly native to the Ivory Coast) set up small shops with staple food coming from their begging activities (systematically organized between those who can stay on the streets and those who are too old or unhealthy to do so), and from minor economic transactions with the adjoining villages and local traders.

Following strong pressure from the media after the closure of the camp, the Tunisian government decided to offer some refugees the possibility of applying for a carte de sejour on Tunisian soil, asking for fingerprints and evidence that these individuals are willing to work and stay in Tunisia. Only some of them accepted, mainly French-speakers (Ivoirians and Chadians) and those engaged in artistic activities with Tunisian and international associations. However, the procedure was never implemented and refugees are still working in a legal vacuum. This strategy, called “local integration”, diverges from the fight for resettlement adopted by the group connected to the blog “Voice of Choucha”, which is mainly

made up of English-speakers (Nigerians, Liberians, Ghanaians) and old, disabled people who are not able to work, and who strenuously reject integration into a "racist" society.

> *This perception of a racist society is linked with the legacy of slavery in Tunisia, and with today's hierarchization of Tunisian society, since new-comers are ranked into old slavery categories according to their phenotype.*

As in Libya, Black migrants in Tunisia are normally hired for low-paid, dangerous jobs, competing with Black Tunisians and creating tensions. Traditionally, socially inferior jobs in the Muslim world are connected to iron and fire, as well as blood and music: Black blacksmiths, butchers, and music artists at weddings can be seen on the streets of North African countries. While Choucha was open, and humanitarian organizations were in charge of it, asylum seekers were allowed to move only to Ben Gardene for limited stays, and were sometimes employed in small jobs with special authorization from the UNHCR. After its closure, its subjects, devoid of any institutional framework which might allow them to enter the Tunisian job market, could and still can find only informal casual jobs in Ben Gardene and Medenine as construction workers and blacksmiths, thereby establishing competition with Black Tunisians. Approaching the issue of refugees in Ben Gardene during my fieldwork in Choucha has meant crashing into the usual wall of suspicion and denial, the culture of silence which covers racism and racial discrimination in Tunisia. Racist acts are an everyday reality: Tropique from Ivory Coast was denied access to cafes many times and had to hide promptly when he saw some drunk people on the streets of Tunis looking for Sub-Saharans after Tunisia was expelled from the Coup d'Afrique, following its defeat against Equatorial Guinea.

> *Refugees are ranked downwards into slavery categories, yet at an inferior level to Black Tunisians.*

What makes Black Foreign Nationals more vulnerable than Black Tunisians is the

absence of a regular institutional position, which forces them to accept lower salaries than Tunisians, thus compromising the job market. Lacking documents and often passports, they circulate on Tunisian soil with their UNHCR document, which is worth nothing. “The police told me I can tear it up; it’s the same”.

Conclusion

In spite of the constant violation of human rights and the determination to “illegalize” migrants by the Tunisian government backed by the European Union with its frontier management branches, refugees in Tunisia managed to recreate an identity and a living out of a state of imposed anomie.

> *The case of Choucha shows how the choice of externalizing the border must be carefully analyzed both at a local level as well as at an institutional one.*

If the countries to whom we are assigning refugee management are systematic violators of human rights, these host societies can also be unprepared to welcome new-comers – dividing them on the basis of deep-rooted categories referring to long-standing historical phenomena like slavery, and triggering acts of racism and labor exploitation due to their perceived racial inferiority. These social cleavages, along with the institutional invisibility of refugees, and the repressive shift of post-revolutionary governments in North Africa, unveil a reality of different levels of integration, as well as competition in accessing resources and benefits.

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When You Can’t Go Home Again #MeadCompetition

Christopher Woodson
February, 2017

A cold, wet, arctic wind graces the concrete skin of the Tenderloin. Pill Hill, the three-block stretch of inner city urbanity, along Leavenworth Avenue and between Turk and McAllister streets, known by the locals for the cornucopia of illegal pharmaceuticals made available by out-of-town pusher men, lies inhabited at this particular hour only by a winter howl, some trash, and a few unlucky homeless. Corner stores, the way stations between destinations at this hour, see a few alcoholics, desperate grazers, and tourists pass through their thresholds,

peruse the mostly dry goods, make a purchase, then depart back out into the stormy streets. The stony edifice of those who man these urban wellsprings, night after night, peer out at each passing consumer like the gargoyles that used to adorn the masonic doorways of cathedrals, town halls, and other esoteric meeting places. As they speak, the price of every purchase is gurgled to every consumer, as if they were reminding of us of each passing sin. The consumer repents and is released.

Other than the corner stores, the glowing beacons in the night, there are a handful of bars, hostels, and cheap hotels. The bars rarely deviate from what's expected of your typical dive bar — wood paneled, about as large as most people's first apartment, a jukebox in the corner, maybe three beers on tap, and potentially either a pool table, a stage, or darts. The hostels are often inhabited by an invisible population of young Europeans on long term holidays. The cheap hotels, on the other hand, are inhabited by an equally invisible, yet more proportionally ignored, population of very low-income residents, strung-out addicts, and medically indisposed individuals.

> *All of them are fighting against this harsh environment.*

There are a few peculiar places in, what one of my friends' calls the Tenderloin, "The Last of The Wild West." On Turk Street, between Taylor and Jones, there is what would appear from first glance, a storefront. Avert your eyes upward, as if you're asking some God in the sky for repentance, and you will a see a matte, grey gun-metal sign with the words "DRUGS SF" seemingly burned into it. My first guess at the type of operation they have going on, just behind some black metal bars and single pane windows, is that of a needle exchange. Word on the street, however, is that their particular operation is more all-inclusive. From how the sidewalk appears, during days when it is considerably less stormy, it would seem that the word on the street, as always, has more merit than than most would give it.

On this particular Tuesday night, however, I find myself across the street from

Aunt Charlie's, in a church. It is three days before Christmas and it is a holiday party at a Rescue Mission, at which I provide social services to the homeless and low-income individuals of San Francisco and the surrounding areas. I am watching a short, Phillipino man, in light blue, denim jeans and a black shirt on which the words "SF City Impact" are printed. He is the pastor. He is their pastor, Pastor Ralph. Pastor Ralph is speaking into the microphone, trying to get above the noise of those who have seemingly found God through work, and succeeds in getting the joyous crowd in playing Two Truths and A Lie. It seems that, as I have arrived late, that I missed the part of the night where each member of the congregation wrote out two truths and a lie about themselves.

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My first case, working here, was an older, blind, white woman. She came up to me, with a cane, and sat down with her mail, asking me to read it for her. Her mail, like any mail, told her story. Frankly, they were all healthcare and municipal letters. Nothing personal. I would look up, occasionally, into her glazed eyes or at her mangled, grey, mane of hair. Her hair looked like it had just frosted over, and not grayed. Her eyes also seemed to have frosted over a bit. It looked as though they had soaked in too many sights like a sponge and simply couldn't hold any more of this world.

> *Where she may have, at one point, received love letters, now she only receives mail from those wanting to collect their dues.*

She is alone. She is alone and has gone blind from cataracts. She was too poor to afford the necessary healthcare. My supervisor informs me that it is our job to circumvent the city's infrastructure so that she is no longer alone, blind, and without care. Despite these facts, however, she is unwilling to accept the fact that she needs someone to watch over her. Her condition, while physical, had consumed more than her eyes. It had consumed her sense of survival. Light had only become a memory, and deliverance from the darkness seemed unlikely.

When any living thing is placed in an unfamiliar environment, adaption takes place. What happens though, when its not the environment that changes, but instead how we see it? How we smell it? How we listen to it? Do the stories we tell ourselves disappear?

These stories are often untold, but that does not mean that they are not lived and etched into the minds of those who inhabit the streets of our cities. Told to themselves, often without any other audience, the pages of years that pass them by, filled with words and spacing foreign to most, may as well be as unreadable to us as this page is to the blind. Poverty to them, these first world inhabitants, is a sight unseen, and a condition undefined, by virtually everyone. The internet, an engine of outrage and then, ultimately, antipathy, lacks a proper definition for their condition. Scholars pace ivory floorboards, buoyed by the two breaker waves of industrialism and late stage capitalism whose curl and crash rips others into the sea.

It is in this liminal middle place, between sea and shore, torn between the grasp of one and the harbor of another, that most find themselves. Struggling, screaming, crying for recognition, until their voices become hoarse, and either the tide relents or they are pulled under. The cityscape, static and lifeless, weeps for no one.

The stage for this tragicomedy to play out is the spaces between buildings, between doorways, and under bridges. The environment we build, as toolmakers and deacons of stone, glass, and steel, becomes the foreground for love, loss, and connection. Through this manipulation of fundamental elements, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, and neon, and through a perceptiveness towards nature, the winds, the rain, the sun, and the heat, civilization takes rise.

> *The tragic irony lies in the abundance of fruit from our labors. It is in that abundance, the space between buildings, doorways, harvests, that the seeds of poverty and need are sewn.*

The comedy is that of errors, of blind decisions, and of misperceptions. No civilization ever to have risen from the earth has ever eliminated poverty. That is because poverty, in and of itself, results from civilization. Civilization and agriculture, two of humanity's greatest achievements, manifestations of our will to survive and reproduce the wild, have bred their own dangers.

The blind woman is looking towards me, maybe at me, possibly through me. To her, I am an echo in a cave, sounded from the mouth, a reminder of a different world. Who knows how long she, and others like her, will be stuck here, or how they will leave.

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The building's doorway lies behind a gated threshold, which is often attended to by a stony-faced acolyte of the church. Inside is modesty. A white tile floor, broken up by a garish brown-tiled cross, a lovely piano, a stage, and a red curtain, separating the kitchen, social services, and the clinic from the barebones church hall, are the only material extravagances here. The only real shared trait of those here is that they've decided to journey through the stormy Tenderloin and, instead of entering a drug den or a bar (at least, on this particular night), cross this particular threshold into the building.

These people really believe, in the Christian idea of God. Somewhere, in the prefrontal cortex, the attention, executive action, and memory river of the brain, lives their religion. Through their actions, the focused repetition of memory, symbols, and ritual, is created the community standing before me. That community is, most lazily, described as made up of the quintessential "happy Christian," a sort of folk archetype that makes up so many church congregations throughout America. This is the last place I would have ever thought a gay, genderqueer anthropologist to have turned up.

Perhaps a better description would be that this community's devotion has an anesthetic effect on much of what they see on a daily basis. Frankly, I see why it's

necessary. Between cases, often those who work here will pray with their patients. Not all healing is physical, or social, I suppose; there are those who are very alone, who'd like to know that someone out there cares about them.

Meanwhile, I can often be found talking to someone about the pants they need. Or the socks. Or the underwear. Or the shoes. Wrapped in acrid, old clothing, the need for clothing is possibly the most often overlooked, ironically. Weeks spent in the same few pairs of underwear, pants, and shirts, often without access to showers, laundry, and, in extremity, bathrooms, can sometimes tar clothing with unwanted filth. As with so many of their needs, it may seem simple, ordinary. As with homes, however, clothing is another thing we often take for granted in "civilization."

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The congregation is drinking root beer. The storm rages on. The pastor is preaching God's love with one of his 6 children, a small girl, ribbons in her hair, at his feet, clinging to the leg of her father. There is a weary cheerfulness that lingers in those that work here, much as I imagine there was in the hearts of those who first arrived in San Francisco.

The trade here, as far as I can tell, is that of endings. Heaven, hell, the birth of Christ, the death of Christ, or the new year, there's a type of over-anticipation of the passing through a certain threshold.

> *And here, in this place full of sinners, saints, and redeemers, that type of anticipation, that anxiety, of the uncertain cuts deep.*

What is promised, what is hoped for, is deliverance. Deliverance from a needle, deliverance from blindness, deliverance from love, or madness, gone wrong. I wonder, sometimes, when they pray, in hushed voices, if God doesn't answer because he can't hear them, and wants them to speak up. I may humor, but many

here do question their place, and why God hasn't spoken to them on an individual, personal level.

Deliverance, however, is another threshold, another doorway, to an uncertain place. When faith is either rewarded or betrayed, it goes somewhere. When it is rewarded, the faith is reinforced. When it is betrayed, it can be broken. Either way it is reborn, in new clothes, and within a new home.

The truth is, many here are at the extremes of their being. Many have come here, myself included, through simple twists of fate. The death of a loved one, the abandonment by a parent or family, a legitimate business deal gone wrong, a horrible accident to the body, advanced age, these are all incredibly common stories of the homeless. It can happen to anyone. Drug use is merely symptomatic of underlying turmoil.

When it happens, when the roofs caves in, when the fires consume the photographs, when the paint is stripped, when the flowers in the garden die, what is left of a home? Where do we move on to? Where or what will be delivered to? When we are pushed to the very extreme limits of faith and hope?

The very extreme of ourselves, find ourselves bare, in the wild. Faith, barely clinging, becomes the cloth with which you are clothed. Hope, the roof over your head.

Hope, and faith, ultimately betrays the believer, in that all things must come to an end. The way of nature is multiplicity and adaptation. As circumstances change, as homes fade and loved ones depart, so too must certain types of faith and hope. These things must bend, or they break. Faith, love, and hope are reactions to the uncertain, to the ever changing environment.

What lies deeper, beneath the shapeshifting, ontological outlooks, beneath the dogma, beneath the love, the hate, the hope, and the despair, is something more, something unchangeable. Each and every one of us, on the inside, we're bigger than the religions, the loves, the hates, the hopes, and the despairs that haunt us.

> *No one moment, month, week, or year's fill of anxiety, grief, depression, dissociation, sadness, euphoria, contentedness, or happiness defines us entirely. These things are a river, reflecting the sky above, and we are that which float on the current.*

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Gallows humor is another trade here. Jokes about death, drug abuse, and mental health permissively decorate the language as much as the crucifixes decking the halls of the church. A lack of material wealth certainly informs a certain spiritual wealth.

Those however, that I have seen successfully get off the street, or deal with a major health problem, or get that job, often find themselves hitting a glass ceiling. If they get off the street, they may find themselves in an SRO — usually a room of an older hotel that has been rezoned for longer term living. While not particularly wholesome, I have found them to at least be lively. For most though, it is the end of the line (although I personally hope it is not). That is the story of class mobility.

San Francisco is an active war against the homeless, make no mistake. The local government is cleansing the streets of encampments. Residents, mostly new, can go viral by posting rants against the poverty they see, seeming void of any empathy. More insidious itself is the abuse with the system designed to help them. Non-profits competing for funding resources often do not work together in tandem to face the issue. SRO owners abuse the power they've been given, and shelter workers steal while some slumber. These are only the threats faced by the environment and not the threats that come from other homeless, pimps, dealers, and the massively dysfunctional bureaucracy of the welfare system. This is what first world poverty looks like. Compared to this, faith is simple.

The party is over. Christmas will come, as it always has, and there is nothing we can do to stop it. We are not hoping for Christmas, instead we need it to come as

a break from the winter, from the isolation, and from the cold. In the minds of the congregation, memories of Christmas past, in homes, waking up to families, presents of toys and clothing.

> *Deliverance, served. The cycle of seasons, of love, and of memory being renewed. For better or worse.*

I look around, and across the room I see the my first client, who has become a volunteer since I last saw her, and she is no longer using her cane. She is no longer blind, after a surgery we helped her through. Apparently, my supervisor tells me with a laugh and a smile, on the day he visited her, not longer after the surgery itself, in the middle of the euphoria provided by the long journey through the darkness, she turned to him and said, "I never realized you're black!" Sometimes, life just surprises us.

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Postscript

Much later, after my departure from the concentric circles that make up the social services of San Francisco, SF City Impact, and the home that I did not know was home at the time, would go through a tectonic shift, regarding its organization. Christmas passed into Lent, and with Lent, a purging of that which bears weight on the soul. Of this purging, my departure was one of the first.

I left, amicable with most of the organization's members. It was with my supervisor with whom I fought, both victims of what I would learn to name as "empathy burnout." I had stretched myself too thin over the process by which one performs ethnography, and he had stretched himself thin over the process by which one performs social work and leadership. After a brief, yet aggressive and hushed berating from him, I left. I walked out. Pass the cross on the floor, through the door, and out of the threshold.

Three months later, I found out that he had relapsed, and the social services department had closed. On my return, I find just four walls, a floor, and a roof. Once charged with symbolism, with crucifixes and computers, simulacra for beliefs and thought processes, and fervent with personal connection, now a void, a vacuum. The blinds are closed, and those in the light had fallen into darkness again, at the cost of the deliverance of others. I wonder, is this deliverance? Is this Grace? Or is it the cycle renewing itself?

Homes are fragile things. They appear, from the inside, to be safe, unchanging, and sound. Four walls. They are most present in the past, but the past is just our memory, and the memories we share with others. A floor. They are ourselves, they are our environment, they are the people around us. A roof. These memories, our relationship with the passing of time, are vulnerable to change, to decay and adornment. A doorway, with many people waiting to go through.