Talking About Arabs: How opinions on Arabs and Muslims are produced in different parts of Europe?

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Are Eastern and Central regions of the EU more Islamophobic than its Western part? This was the question that brought together scholars from different European countries to Prague in May 2016, where the workshop entitled "Talking

about Arabs. Echoes from Different Europes" took place.[1] If the events of 2015, such as the immigration emergency, the Cologne attacks and Paris shootings precipitated fears across the continent, Central and Eastern Europe appeared as particularly unwelcoming towards the populations fleeing conflicts in the Middle East. The concentration of Islamophobic reactions in this part of Europe was widely interpreted as a sign of "a split of mentalities" between the "old Europe" and its ex-communist States. The latter were accused of being parochial, xenophobic and not fully "European", whereas these countries themselves claimed to act as barriers of Europe, protecting its borders and values. These dichotomies were predominantly explained by the contrasting historical experiences of apprehending the Other in areas east and west of the former Berlin wall.

The workshop, organized by the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences sought to complexify these all-too-easy dichotomies. It departed from a hypothesis that the apparently contrasting attitudes towards Middle Eastern refugees were related to different ways in which knowledge about Arabs and Muslims is produced in Europe. Different media cultures, specific disciplinary approaches of the academic inquiry on the region, the lack of political interest in the Middle East, and the role of professionals engaging with the region (tourism agencies, security experts, NGOs, businessmen), all contribute in shaping the image of the region and its populations. On the basis of concrete empirical studies, conducted in France, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania and the Czech Republic, participants of the workshop engaged in a two-day intensive discussion about how opinions about Arabs and Muslims are forged in different parts of Europe.

> *A central question addressed during the workshop was the extent to which the perceptions of Arabs in Central Eastern Europe were shaped by the thorny issue of European integration.*

Anxieties related to their own peripheral position within the EU provided the main

angle through which the issue of refugees was debated in most of the discussed countries. The study of the debate in Lithuanian op-eds, presented by Ieva Zakareviciute and myself, revealed that both anti- and pro-refugee camps portrayed "the crisis" as an opportunity for Lithuania to finally become a respected member of the European club. Whereas some commentators argued that Lithuanian solidarity with refugees would strengthen its positions within the EU, others called, on the contrary, for a closed-door policy, which would allow Lithuania to play a role in "saving Europe" from its "pink multi-cultural dream".

Both positions rested on the same hope that the refugees would replace Lithuanians as the Others of Europe.

Similarly, in the Hungarian case, discussed by Omar Sayfo, the far-right movement adopted Islamophobic attitudes only recently, partly as a result of Hungary's entry in the EU. Historically, the Hungarian far-right scene was sympathetic to Islam and Arab countries, a position that was shaped by its traditional anti-Semitism. However, the Hungarian far-right was increasingly pushed to align itself with the attitudes of its European counterparts, as a result of the implicit pressure on Hungarian parties to redefine their identities in line with the European parties system. The Polish case, discussed by Konrad Pedziwiatr, is not dissimilar in this regard. There, anti-Muslim sentiments increased as the result of the uncritical import of Western fears, combined with a context where the loss of former Polish Others (Jews and communists) triggered a need for finding new ones.

Hence, the Europeanization of Central Eastern European states means not only their integration into the European market, free labor movement and uniformization of laws, but also a facilitated circulation of Islamophobic discourses.

Orientalist image By Unknown – Louvre Museum, Public Domain,
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The import of Western European fears and experiences in dealing with Muslim minorities, as well as their adjustment to Central European realities and instrumentalization in local political battles, came into prominence in the workshop. Interestingly, in some cases marginal Islamophobic "truths" in the West transform into a mainstream discourse when they reach its Eastern neighbors. This was reflected in the ways the 2012 scandal over the Brussels Christmas Tree was used in Lithuanian media in 2015 as a proof of "Arab cultural encroachment" on Europe. In 2012, the decision of Brussels municipality to replace the traditional pine tree with a light installation was interpreted by some as the mayor's surrender to Muslim cultural dictate. In 2015, this story re-surfaced in Lithuanian media under a new version, according to which the Brussels Christmas Tree was not replaced by an installation, but banned altogether as a result of Muslim lobbying. Thereby, the version circulating through European extreme-right websites entered mainstream Lithuanian debate, supporting the argument of a potential cultural domination by refugees in Europe. This event illustrates well how the image of a unified "Arab culture" is

constructed.

European local disagreements over the shape of the Christmas tree are being projected on Muslims in order to define "the European culture" by contrast to the imagined "Arab culture".

Focusing on the Cologne attacks, Aymon Kreil's paper showed how the choice to designate some elements of "the Arab culture" via untranslated Arabic words contributes to represent 'Arabs' as absolute 'others'. The German police's explanation of the Cologne attacks as "taharrush gamea", a misspelled Arabic translation for "sexual harassment", contributed to the portrayal of this phenomenon as specific to Arabs and Muslims. The weight of the stereotype of Muslim men as sexually violent explains the popularity of theories according to which the Cologne attacks should be explained in cultural terms.

Lastly, the workshop aimed to explore a relatively untouched zone of the research – the role of practitioners connected to the Middle East through professional work. Focusing on Czech tourism advertisements to Morocco, Katarina Maruskinova showed how the tourism industry tends to essentialise Arabs for a commercial purpose.

As it was argued, in general Czech tourism agencies prefer to exclude the representation of Arab locals in their advertisements, stressing instead beautiful empty beaches and the sun.

When they are present, however, they are usually portrayed as faceless, wearing what is defined as "traditional" – rural, Bedouin or Berber – attire. Islam remains the main identification of locals, as well as their extraordinary talents in selling touristic souvenirs. Klara Bednarova, on her part, discussed the role of a Czech NGO in democracy assistance programs implemented in North African countries following "the Arab Spring". The Arab revolutions in 2011 gave a feeling of entitlement to some Central European countries in sharing with Middle Eastern

countries their experiences of 1990s revolutions. However, the question as to whether the encounters made possible through these initiatives could remain devoid of prejudice, exotification and patronization, remains open.

Intended as the first in a series of events on knowledge production about Arabs in Europe, the workshop succeeded in highlighting areas for future research. The comparative perspective adopted in this first workshop allowed to detect some commonalities between different European countries. The patterns of circulation of Islamophobic discourses from West to East, media techniques underpinning the construction of Arab stereotypes, and the relationships between the spread of Islamophobia in Central Eastern Europe and its integration into the larger European community are the themes on which the second workshop, scheduled for 2018, is expected to focus.

[1] The presentations of the workshop is available online at this URL: https://soundcloud.com/user-47302774

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Insiders, Outsiders, and Intellectual Kinship

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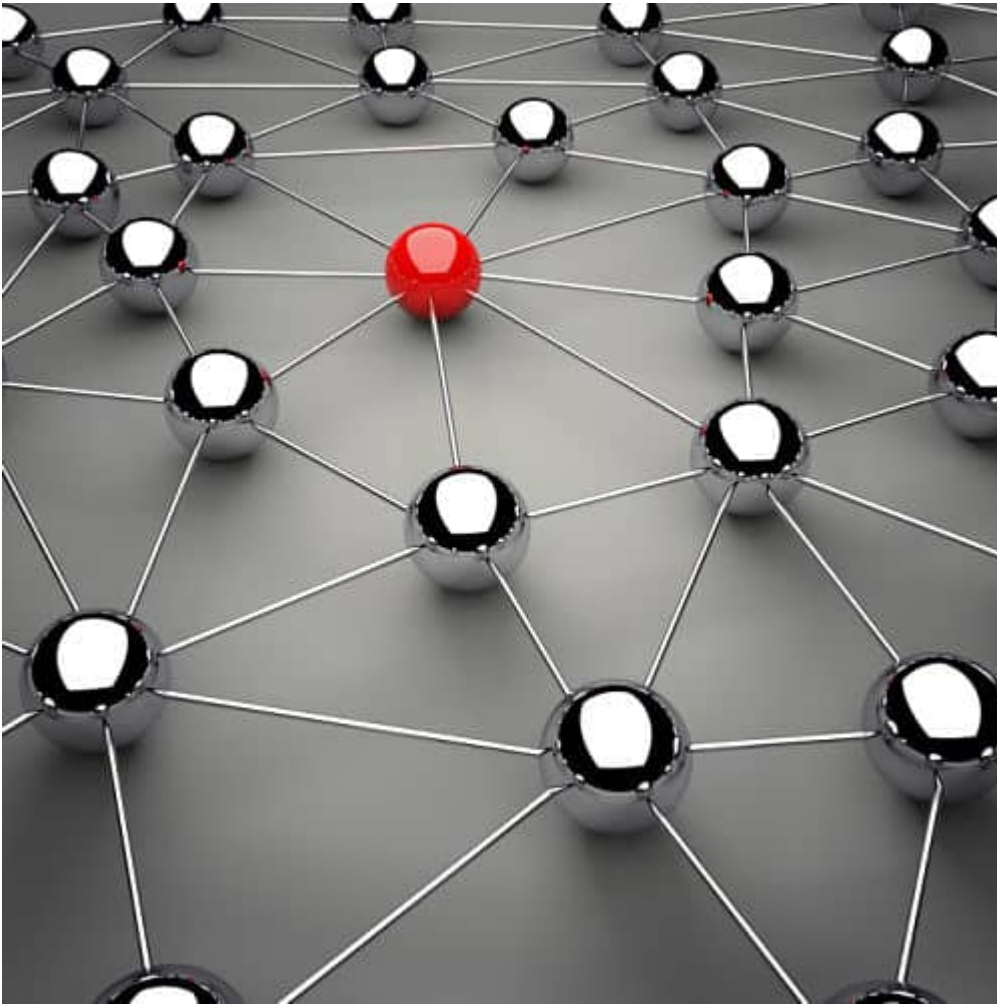
Marshall Sahlins once dismissed the possibility that teacher-student relationships might be a kind of kinship. 'Persons may have various relational attributes and thus be *linked* to diverse others – *the way I am related to my students as a teacher* and to the Chicago Cubs as a fan – without being united in being with them', he says (2013: 25, emphases added). Nevertheless, many intellectuals and academics sometimes describe, understand, or act upon their relationships with other scholars in terms of kinship to such an extent that, while often taken for granted, kinship may in fact be the central to the analysis of academic life.

We can all recognize one form of this *intellectual kinship* in the practice of asking who a scholar works with. Asking about a scholar's teacher is a common way of trying to place them not only in an academic genealogy, but also intellectually, socially, and often politically, it is an attempt to find out *who* a scholar comes

from. I encountered these and other ways scholars think about or act upon academic generational relationships during my three years of ethnographic fieldwork and archival research with three North Indian departments of anthropology and sociology since independence (in 1947).

Many scholars I encountered discussed their relationships and community in kinship terms.

One alumnus of the Delhi School of Economics' ("D School") Sociology Department asked me who else I had talked to, and I found him somewhat appalled by the several names I listed in response. Apparently, most of the names that had immediately come to mind belonged to students of A.M. Shah and perhaps a couple of André Béteille and Veena Das. He suggested in no uncertain terms that my research would be incomplete, if not meaningless, were I not to speak with J.P.S. Uberoi's students as well – the people I had been speaking with thus far belonged to completely 'different families,' different 'species', he said.

Another D School sociology alumni – who had risen through the ranks from a research associate to a full professor – more directly addressed the fact that the department had historically hired its own graduates as faculty. While recognizing that this was considered 'incestuous' and 'inbreeding' in 'the West', she argued that it was in fact 'productive' to have, along with some 'outsiders', a 'group that has studied here and is working here' to give the institution a 'sense of continuity'. She described this continuity in terms of 'intellectual pedigree', 'genealogy', and 'intellectual tradition' being 'carried forward'. Although students did not simply replicate their teachers' ideas and approaches, she said, 'there's a sense in which you cut your teeth on the ideas of your teachers, and sometimes, when you're writing something... You hear the echoes. You hear the reverberations. You hear the resistances as well. But you get the resonances and the resistances'. Even if not through any simple process of transmission, this professor found that a shared experience of training over multiple generations, at least in subtle ways, connected the intellectual character or thinking of

academics.

In addition to their intellectual significance, as with 'kinning and dekinning (as moral-political-economic processes)' (Feeley-Harnik 2013: 212) generally, these forms of relatedness (Carsten 2000), also produce political asymmetries. For example, after an anthropology professor spoke as part of a panel in a plenary session at a 2012 national conference of the Indian Sociological Society, an audience member questioned the appropriateness of his discussion of kinship in the disciplinary context of sociology, saying 'kinship anthropologizes sociology', implying that kinship and/or anthropology are bad and inappropriate in a sociology of contemporary India. One of the professor's main defenses was to refer to his degree in sociology as well as anthropology, and allude to his relation to important anthropologists and sociologists. In other words, his responses justified his right to speak (and speak on kinship) in sociology based not only on intellectual grounds, but also on his training in multiple disciplines, one of which gives him membership in a prominent sociological intellectual genealogy. At another point, he also made passing reference to a prominent scholar, who was a student of the same professor, as his '*guru bhai*' (literally: a brother from the same *guru*).

In contrast to that professor's 'insider' status, 'outsider'-ness was a term that I heard often, though not always identically applied. It is a relative term and, as I have alluded, can exist within a single department. It may diminish somewhat over time. But even professors who have spent decades, most of their adult lives, in one department may permanently feel as relative outsiders if, say, their only degree from the department in which they teach is their PhD.

These ideas came up, for example, in an interview with a senior professor who explained to me that, in order to understand his department, I would need to pay attention to people's 'migratory patterns'. He pointed out how two professors who had studied in another university tended to stick together. On a piece of paper, he drew me a table listing three types of faculty, the 'indigenous' (who all received their degrees from the department), those who received some or all their degrees

in the department but had some experience teaching or studying outside before returning, and the very few total 'outsiders' who had not been students of the department in which they teach. He explained that these outsiders almost never fully 'integrate'. Expanding on this point, he said outsiders may think they or their previous institutions are better, or may not 'belong' or show proper respect to the retired teachers of this department. However, another professor had a different perspective on outsider-hood. He suggested the connection between the outsider-professors was at least as much out of sympathy for the difficulty of entering a new department as an outsider as it was out of any regional solidarity. He also suggested that migratory patterns was a poor conceptualization; and proposed instead the importance of paying attention to 'umbilical cords' – subsequently naming all the professors in the department along with their students who were now junior faculty, of which there were several.

There is not one singular view of the workings of these generational relationships.

They might be seen as multiple "genealogical imagination[s]" (Shryock 1997) that must be created, maintained, and are often contested. Yet these stories are suggestive of conditions discussed in literature on how kinship is made. For example, many theorists have argued that kinship is created through shared substances (e.g., Carsten 1995), the identity of which may vary cross-culturally. As in the *guru bhai* reference, I often heard scholars describe their academic relationships and genealogies in terms of *guru-shishya* relationships and genealogies. To cover large ground very briefly, in a discussion of *guru-shishya* relationships, Barth has gone so far as to argue that knowledge is 'the essence of generative substance' in 'Indian concepts of personhood' (1993: 648), thus, providing grounds for an argument that the sharing of such a substance is a source of kinship.

Even though academic genealogical imaginations can be found in many places, as one would expect, meanings vary, and cultural, historical, and religious

contexts matter.

We might consider again the audience member who was sufficiently offended by a discussion of the continuing relevance of kinship to Indian life – even in urban settings and under the influence of globalization – that he dismissed it as anthropologizing sociology. Depictions of kinship as influencing aspects of social life outside some narrowly defined domain can evoke loaded associations with ideas like 'tradition' and 'nepotism'. A parallel discomfort was visible in the reference one professor made to the idea of academic incest, simultaneously recognizing the existence of academic kin ties while stigmatizing them and demonstrating the awkwardness some kinds of generational relations can generate for scholars.

That awkwardness represents an ambivalence also found among some of the academics in 'the West', viewed by the professor as looking down on intellectual genealogy. [Some studies](#) have pointed out how, even if they are not hiring their own alumni, relatively small groups of elite universities (or [anthropology departments](#)) are much more likely to hire each other's graduates. These studies commonly raise reactions of alarm about nepotism versus arguments about the relative quality of work coming out of different institutions, but little discussion of how such a phenomenon may be socially produced regardless. At the same time, scholars in disciplines like [mathematics](#) and [physical anthropology](#) have been building large academic genealogical databases. This genealogical interest reflects the importance of these relationships and a recognition that the educational enterprise would be meaningless without them. A recognition of the [centrality of genealogical relationships](#) to academic life is also often a basis for critiques of audit cultures (Strathern 2000) and efforts to 'corporatize' higher education. This ambivalence indicates a difficulty in reconciling ideas about the nature of academic life—the challenges and necessity of its human dimensions—that an understanding of academia as intellectual kinship might aid scholars to come to grips with.

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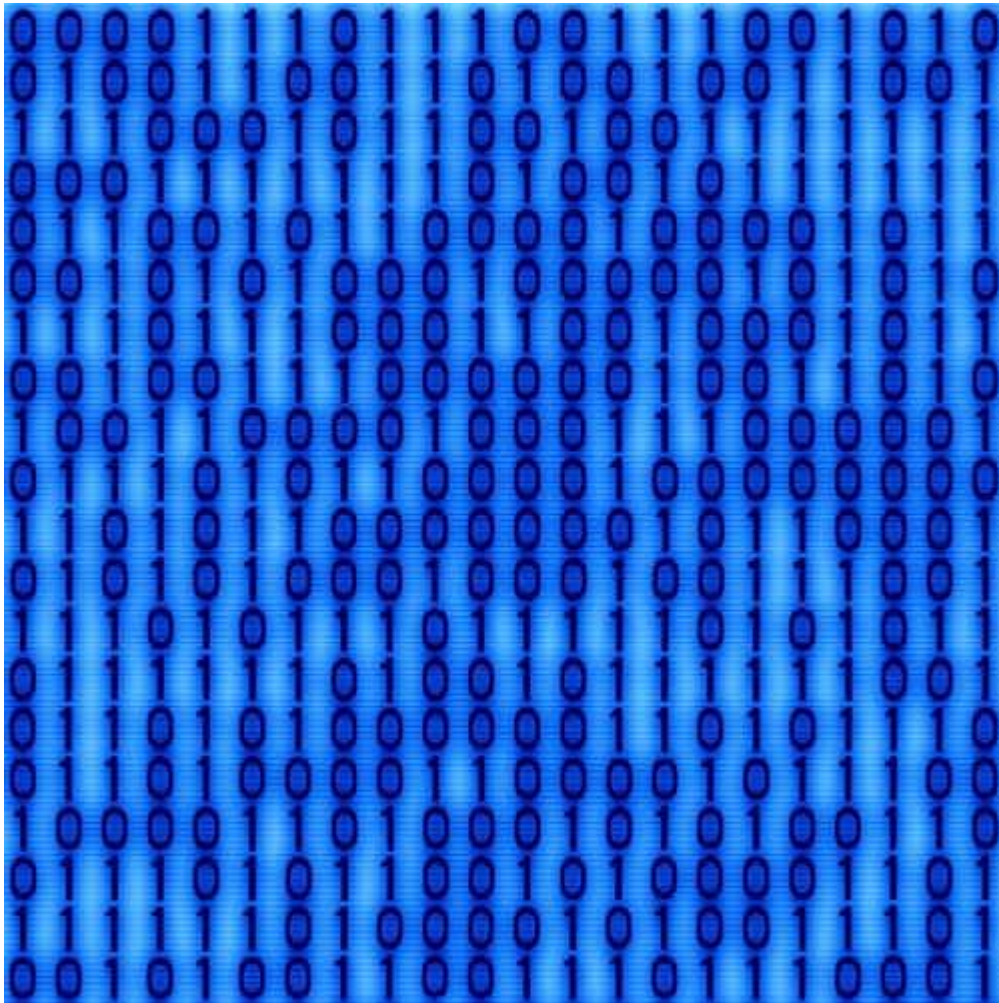*Authority in Tribal Jordan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

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Neoliberalism as Liberation in Russian Data Science

Ian Lowrie
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It should not be too controversial to say that the Russian university system is somewhat dilapidated. Certainly, this was the opinion of many of the computer science and mathematics faculty members I met during my fieldwork with Russian data scientists. They complained about corruption, outdated methods, lack of equipment, crumbling facilities: the whole nine postsocialist yards. Of course, they were also quick to point out the truly staggering contributions to mathematics and theoretical physics made by their professional ancestors despite the current state of intellectual disrepair. Rather than yearning for a position abroad, however, or indulging a nostalgia for better days, most of the scientists I worked with were eager to meet the demands of the day with practical, concrete efforts to reform their institutional environment. These knowledge workers self-consciously styled themselves as part of a revolutionary vanguard, keen to deploy management techniques drawn from the "Western" repertoire to establish truly

rational governance of the university and their own selves.

Though one could find clusters of technocratic agitators at most of the universities I visited, the Higher School of Education (where I ended up spending most of my time during fieldwork) was the only place I found in which they seemed to be in positions of both scholarly and administrative power. The Higher School is an elite Moscow institution founded in 1992, putatively after the model of the Western research university. My research there focused on a new department of computer science, founded with substantial logistical support from [Yandex](), a web infrastructure firm that my informants frequently called, not without humor, "sort of a Russian google." This department aspired to be, perhaps above all, an oasis of "rationalized governance," free from the suffocating intellectual conformity (which my informants sometimes ironically called *partinost'*) and the corrupting influence of patronage networks (*blat*) that its members universally felt dominated much of the Russian educational system.

One crucial component of this rationalization was the wholesale and enthusiastic adoption of audit culture (Strathern 2000) and the deployment of neoliberal techniques of self-management at both the personal and institutional level (Michael, Marshall, and Fitzsimons 2000).

The implementation of such techniques is clearly widespread. Mining the veins of inquiry into the impact of neoliberal audit culture on Western higher education opened by Shore and Wright (1999), ethnographers of higher education have found its global reach surprisingly ubiquitous (e.g. contributors to Canaan and Shumar 2008). In these narratives, the quantification of research and teaching output, the expansion of administrative oversight, the making contingent of labour, and the bureaucratization of personal relationships combine to form a system of flexible control over a newly precarious professoriate, positioned as in service to students reimagined as customers. Yet by and large these have been tragic tales in which the free exercise of creativity, the principled education of young scholars, and the passionate commitment to a life of the mind are under

assault by the quantified, the bureaucratic, the mundane, the corporate. My informants, by contrast, are willing to accept the outrages of managerial control to eke out a place for themselves at the scientific table. Indeed they are committed scientists who *chose* to work in the university precisely because of their belief in what they feel to be its unique promise: the ability to freely and honestly pursue science as a vocation (Weber 1946).

This does not mean, however, that they were any great innovators of administrative technique. Rather than surprising hybrids or interesting mutations, most of the techniques they used to assemble their local audit culture and govern their work practices were rather straightforwardly drawn from the neoliberal repertoire. More than one of my interviewees, for example, recommended that I read Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow* to understand how it felt to be on a productive "programming jag." One had his students read *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* during their first year of dissertation work. Another religiously followed the Pomodoro technique. This repertoire also informed their institutional engagement: all of them were universally proud that their compensation was directly tied to their number of publications in vetted, english-language journals, and that student evaluations were quantitative and tied directly to their advancement. Indeed, many of them brought their data-scientific expertise to bear in developing metrics to measure their own performance. They were also proud to be working in a department founded upon academic-industrial collaboration. In part, this was mercenary: my informants were mostly data scientists, hungry for real world data that they could use in their research. More profoundly, however, ties to industry were viewed as a critical tool for keeping the educational sector "honest"; The Higher School invited members from Yandex to sit on the academic council of their new department not primarily to help direct the research agenda, but to provide input on the curriculum, and ensure that the department continued to teach its students "only useful and modern techniques," rather than allowing its professors to continue to "read the same old lectures from the 1990s." For my informants, this was a crucial, "cultural" shift away from a commitment to "lazy tradition," in a discipline where traditionalism firmly

excluded one from full participation in either industrial or academic activity at the global level.

It is easy for jaded scholars of the corporate university to wring their hands or to smirk about the willing uptake of such pernicious neoliberal technologies of control and organization. As a participant in anthropological conversations about audit culture and the neoliberal university myself, my initial reaction was to fret about the potential long-term consequences of such projects. When I pushed back against my friends' more enthusiastic endorsements of audit culture, though, they bristled. One told me that I just didn't understand how stifling it was to work under professors whose "knowledge stopped in the 90s," and lose out on advancement to colleagues whose supposedly peer-reviewed publications were in fact "arranged" by those same "tea drinkers." As another put it, "it's hard to worry about corrupting science when the university is already corrupt." Far from being in service to a scheme of control put in place by entrenched managerial elites, neoliberal techniques here form part of an oppositional, reformist project being launched by committed scholars and teachers, trying to clear space to get on with the business of teaching and scholarship.

In other words, the demand for clarification, quantification, rationalization, and industrialization of the university field is a calculated political move being made by the dominated fraction of the class dominating the academic establishment (Bourdieu 1990).

Graduate students, docents, and young professors are trying to imagine hopeful scientific futures for themselves outside of the stuffy, "tea-drinking" world of the entrenched and nostalgic academic elite. Certainly, members of dominated class fractions often are required to act more strategically than their dominant colleagues in navigating the academic field (Peacock 2016). However, this explanation does not fully exhaust the situation in Russian computer science, where these culturally and bureaucratically subordinated workers are not especially "precarious" in the sense that term has come to carry in commentary

on higher education. For one thing, graduate students are virtually guaranteed employment at their university upon finishing their degree (my friends were universally horrified to find out this was not the case at my own university). For another, while university wages are abysmally low, if my informants were to fall out of academia, they would almost universally fall *up*, into readily-available and extremely high-paying data scientist jobs in either local or European industry. Instead, they choose to stay and participate in academia and in reforming the university.

Beyond being a strategic response to domination, then, the active participation in neoliberalizing their work practices and institutions appears inextricable from their commitment to science as a vocation. Certainly, some left for business simply because they felt it was the only place to "get good science done in Russia today" (echoing the feelings of the similarly passionate corporate scientists described by Rabinow [1996]). Most, however, were committed to the university as both a place of work and an object of reform. For these workers,

> *neoliberal techniques and audit culture were neither foisted upon them, nor uncritically taken up, but rather quite consciously viewed as tools to break out of the mundane professional corruption and the suffocating intellectual conservatism they see all around them.*

Unlike the professors from the faculties of Bourdieu's *Homo Academicus* (1984), my informants' moves are not forced by the ideological and institutional dominance of their local superordinates. Neither are they engaging in some sort of cargo cult neoliberalism: they know that all of the quantification and rationalization in the world do not guarantee scientific virtue. Rather, they hope, and their experience has led them to believe, that such techniques can clear the space for the free exercise of their vocation.

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Antiheroism: the underdog's survival tactic

Eli Thorkelson
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"Where do you put your anger?" a precarious academic asked me poignantly the other day as we talked about the bad job market. The growth of precarious labor tends to *naturalize* academic hierarchy for the successful, I've argued (Thorkelson 2016), while conversely tending to denaturalize it — at times producing rage — for the precarious or unemployed. And in a precarious labor system, denaturalization can become a symbolic counter-reaction, a sort of allergy to domination that erupts among the reserve army of academic labor. Yet

denaturalization can take so many forms. Political denunciation is one of the most straightforward, exemplified in the U.S. context by Marc Bousquet's passionate and voluminous critiques of academic labor (2002, 2003, 2008, 2009). Private anger is another option, one that has the strategic advantage of being able to be forgotten if career circumstances later improve. Here I want to look at a third form: existential scrutiny, where academic hierarchy and academic values get questioned in a more philosophical register. As Michael Jackson observes in his notes on existential anthropology, it is in "border situations" — such as the precarious academic labor regime or the awkward thresholds of graduate education — that "we may recognize and be reconciled to the painful truth that the human world constitutes our common ground, our shared heritage, *not as a place of comfortably consistent unity but as a site of contingency, difference, and struggle*" (2013:11).

Does recognition actually entail reconciliation, though, as Jackson seems to imply? And is recognition of difference and struggle necessarily painful? Or can it become a subaltern pleasure?

I turn here to an ethnographic incident from my French fieldwork where academic hierarchy was subjected to a withering antiheroism. Here success was not naturalized, but rather got drowned in black comedy, introspection, and existential musings. The incident in question took place in May 2011, soon after my return to Chicago after two years in the field. I was still settling into my new apartment and wondering how to pay the rent when one of my closest friends from the field, a philosophy graduate student, commented jokingly on a Facebook post of mine about academic prestige. "If you don't have your Rolex by age 40, you've wasted your life," declared Ishmael (his preferred pseudonym). I gathered that he was being sarcastic, but I asked him what he meant in online chat, which I've translated here into English:

Eli: Hey!

Eli: Are you really sure it's a bad thing to waste your life?

Ishmael: Haha

Ishmael: No

"Haha": it was an announcement that the existential issue was bound to remain refracted, half-unserious, partly sublimated. Seriousness was going to remain playful. Heaviness was going to tread lightly. Initially, Ishmael steered our conversation into the realm of literature:

Ishmael: "I'm the living error. I'm Jean who always played at being alive, in spite of himself." [*Je suis l'erreur qui vit. Je suis Jean qui a toujours joué le vivant malgré lui*.]

Ishmael: (Valere Novarina)

Eli: Who's that?

Ishmael: A Swiss dramaturg who mostly practiced in France

Eli: k

Ishmael: Very poetic

Ishmael: Really like it

Ishmael was existentially aligning himself, I gathered, with the character Jean. Jean stood in for the view that it "isn't necessarily a bad thing to waste your life." But if Jean in turn was identifying himself as a "living error," it remained obscure to me why this was a good thing. Or even, really, what the image meant. So our conversation quickly became a classic example of an ethnographer trying to get clarity from the locals, only to be bowled over by the complexity of local interpretive frameworks. I started out by disagreeing with Ishmael:

Eli: But it's not necessarily lovely to be a living error, I think of my university, which constitutes a negative example of one

In those first months back in Chicago, I was very frustrated by the search for part-time work at my university, and it seemed plausible to me then to picture the institution as a living error. But Ishmael, a great lover of debate, was inclined to disagree. So, of course, we bickered.

Ishmael: I have a hard time imagining a university as a living being

Eli: Well, "living" in the sense that an institution functions

Ishmael: A car functions too

Ishmael: You think it's a living being?

Our debate went on for a few minutes without getting anywhere, so I decided to abandon the subject.

Eli: In any case, dude, no need for a debate about whether institutions are "living"

Eli: It's metaphorical

Eli: But "the living error" is just as metaphorical, right?

Ishmael: Uhh

Ishmael: No

Eli: And so according to you, error is a living species?

Ishmael: No

Eli: What is it then?

Finally, I had found a question that inspired Ishmael's will to teach. This took us into the existential questions that, I would suggest, are often lurking at the heart of academic regimes of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1988).

Ishmael: One can take Jean's statement (in the animal of time) in several ways

Ishmael: 1) He is a monster (an "error of nature" or a "copy error" in genetic terms)

Ishmael: 2) He means that ultimately no NORM can describe his existence; he lays claim to the radical contingency of an individual

Ishmael: Or finally: 3) life and truth never answer to the same requirements; the expression "real life" [*vraie vie*] is a contradiction in terms; the existential hero is a hoax

All of these interpretations were rooted in Ishmael's own sense of himself, I am sure. Having read Bourdieu and developed a high level of ambivalence about academic life, Ishmael always insisted that he himself was both socially produced and also "radically contingent" or even "monstrous," a copy error in the genetic codes of academic reproduction. If we read (1) and (2) together, we could conclude that for Ishmael, only a monster could really be an individual. Accordingly, he was also skeptical of academics who pretended to be authentic heroes of their own stories. I have no doubt that Ishmael's claim that "the existential hero is a hoax" was partly a critique of some of his own colleagues. But was it also a self-critique? What was Jean if not someone seemingly plagued by his own existential problems? What was Ishmael if not someone whose abysses of reflexivity betrayed a restless inability to read himself "reparatively" (Sedgwick 2003)?

Still, I remained confused by all these interpretations, which still seemed metaphorical to me.

Eli: Sure, I grant the plausibility of all these interpretations

Eli: But in none of these cases does "the living error" refer to a living error as such

Ishmael: Well sure it does

Eli: Or are you proposing the reading "I'm the error and it's me who's alive"

Eli: What's the status of the error then?

(There was a long pause before Ishmael came back to his computer.)

Ishmael: The error, that's me ⬜ [*l'erreur c'est moi*]

"The error, that's me": academic self-consciousness in a nutshell.

Being a living error became a way of living in academic institutions without heroism. Living without heroism is the exception to the rule, of course. John Conley (2009) has argued that precarious and degraded work *should* delegitimate heroism as an academic stance, but as Vita Peacock recently showed in a German case (2016), heroism and kingship persist as foundational idioms of academic power. Nevertheless, for "copy errors" like Ishmael, being a living error can provide an idiom for renegotiating relationships with academic power and to the proverbial men with their Rolexes, while also delegitimating their dominance, making it look ridiculous and hyperbolic. In the last analysis, it wasn't a bad thing to waste your life — at least if you got to laugh at it, drowning your self-consciousness in digital laughter and emoticons. And while Jean's living error is hard to generalize about, in a moment of precarious academic labor and intelletual unemployment, we may well find that this kind of existentialist anti-heroism comes to flourish as an underdog's survival tactic.

Anti-heroism no less than anger are ways of being conscious of a present at a historical impasse.

As Lauren Berlant notes, in an impasse, social actors often develop "a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event" (2011:4). Ishmael's ruminations, in turn, hint at an underlying process that has not yet found its genre of event, even if we may find here some clarifying material. I would venture here that thinking antiheroically is an important way of getting beyond the

"standard melodramatic crises" of the job market, which are both awful and also standardized, forcing us into an impoverished alternation between anger and forgetful acquiescence, an affective epistemology that offers a bad choice between egocentrism and nihilism. Antiheroic thinking can show us how to think projectively, as Ishmael did with Jean. When Ishmael imaginatively makes Jean stand in for himself, and when Ishmael in turn stands in for us, we can shake the chains of egocentric identification that too easily reduce the academic world to what Jackson called a "place of comfortably consistent unity." Existentially speaking, it is not and never will be that. But contra Jackson, there may be subversive pleasures in antiheroism (and in identifying with the absurd other) that take us beyond the clichéd "pain" of a life in struggle. One can only hope, extending Conley's argument against heroism in the classroom, that this projective antiheroism can in turn foster some new politics.

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Unravelling Academic Precarity

Ainhoa Montoya
December, 2016

In conversation, scholars cannot help but constantly raise the subject of their increasingly precarious working conditions and the anxieties that derive from them. From such conversations we regard academic precarity as a condition of vulnerability clearly related to a shifting labour market. Employment in this labour market is increasingly part-time and temporary, characterised by contracts that offer deteriorating conditions (e.g. graduate assistant contracts that do not cover annual leave or contribute to a pension, and previously permanent positions that are now contingent on funding). Likewise, an increasing number of fixed-term posts is offered that require a high number of teaching hours to the detriment of the research activities that make scholars permanently employable. It is precisely this notion of academic precarity defined chiefly through labour conditions that we would like to problematize here.

It is no coincidence that the most precarious of academics, early career scholars, are spearheading the few existing public initiatives to tackle precarity in universities (for instance, PrecAnthro). Alongside such initiatives, other scholars have recently positioned precarity within broader processes that are increasingly transforming universities into market-serving and market-like institutions (Wendy Brown 2015; Heatherington and Zerilli 2016; Colectivo Indocentia 2016), and assert the need to "take back the university" (MacKenna 2016; also see Ingold, this section). Elsewhere scholars have focused on how precarity impacts on, and manifests itself in, daily life and work, including fieldwork and the making of ethnography (see Gill 2009; Reddy 2012; MacKenna 2016).

> *Because conversations among colleagues at universities—conversations in which both co-authors participate—are the domain in which much is being currently discussed about precarity (whether or not it is named as such), we have become interested in exploring how academics acknowledge, narrate and experience their own conditions of precarity.*

In this piece, we reflect on the notion of academic precarity and how academics through their actions may contribute to reproducing precarious conditions. As a result of our own positioning and networks, this reflection is based chiefly on what is going on at Western European and US university environments and specifically among anthropology circles. Being based in different countries has made us aware of the different local academic cultures and the need to take into account how these may shape precarity. One of us is a London-based academic currently on a fixed-term contract; the other is a Madrid-based independent and militant researcher[1] who also works as a teacher and writer (this occupational diversity being as much a choice as an imposition given the current paucity of permanent positions). Our discussions on the increasing precarious conditions of academics came directly out of our own experiences as well as a conference we both co-organized in 2014 on the politics of publishing: in which some participants stressed the close relationship between research, publishing and precarity.

Emerging precarious regimes of work in academia are no doubt related to the increasing flexibilization of labour and neoliberalization that characterize other sectors (e.g. the severe cuts to funding and the increasing adoption of entrepreneurial models within them). However, precarity in academia is deepened and exacerbated by other processes attuned with neoliberal logics and that are transforming universities and academic work in specific ways. The entrepreneurial models introduced by university authorities in the management of both universities and academic work have materialized in the quantification of milestones, outcomes and the value of academic work, as well as their constant audit (Shore and Wright 1999, 2015; Strathern 2000).

These transformations at universities are at the root of work intensification and anxiety among academics, as well as of what Dardot and Laval (2013: 261) have referred to as 'entrepreneurial self-government'. Being valued and securing a stable position requires constantly improving your publication record (an intensification of the logic of 'publish or perish'), obtaining external funding for your research (ever more valued if the grants cover academic staff time) and contributing to administrative and managerial tasks. These tasks add up to a substantial range of teaching and research duties—let alone the non-remunerated tasks that all academics contribute to in editorial work. While this free labour is part of academic regimes of work, it goes well beyond them: whether as a result of choice or not, unemployed academics, activists and militant researchers, social organizations, and freelancers involved in education, research and knowledge production, writing and publishing, contribute to academic life without a contract or any kind of pecuniary remuneration.

In this context, deteriorating labour conditions are just the most material and clear aspect of increasing precarity within academia. Yet there is something more going on here. The anxieties and intensification of work also exceed precarious forms of labour and can be regarded as the "precarization of existence" (Precarias a la Deriva 2004). Academics find it increasingly difficult to achieve a work-life balance and often see themselves compromising their personal, family and social life. The precarization of existence is epitomized by shared anxiety over

time. Academics have largely embodied the logic of no time to slow down and constant production set in place by the entrepreneurial models adopted by universities.

Under these circumstances, aspects of life that limit academic production—such as motherhood, or the refusal or inability to relocate for the next job—may become an obstacle for advancing or even pursuing an academic career at all (Kendzior 2013-2016).

As raised by some established academics, these logics are not dependant on job stability and may be experienced by scholars regardless of their work status (Gill 2009; Beswick 2016). Yet they have more acute effects for those who live with the uncertainty of whether their contract will continue at the end of the year, or whether they might have to move or leave academia entirely. Unstable labour conditions make slowing down the rhythm of production a risky possibility for early career scholars wishing to pursue an academic career. This is the case whether university environments are dominated by patronage or meritocracy-based systems while in the former system unstable working conditions favour relationships of dependence (Peacock 2016), in the latter academics may find it difficult to unionize or even recognize the overwhelming workload they have, especially when their contract is subject to periodic renewal.

However, to grasp precarity in academia in all its complexity, we need to unravel yet another layer—the joy associated with the privileges and pleasures that come with academic work.

Academia occupies a privileged position vis-à-vis other much more insecure, badly remunerated, low status, and physically demanding jobs. Most academics are cosmopolitan, mobile, well-travelled, and highly regarded subjects who have accumulated valuable forms of cultural and symbolic capital.

In addition, the intellectual activity involved in academic work can be joyful and

pleasurable itself. Yet all this comes with caveats. Teaching is a clear example: despite being pleasurable for many, it has progressively become a less valued duty than research. For instance, many job appointments are made on the basis of research rather than teaching achievements. Furthermore, the preparation time in teaching is rarely appreciated and rarely adequately remunerated when it comes to casualized contracts. More worryingly, and what can make teaching more tedious, is that it is increasingly being harnessed to serve neoliberal goals (see Brown 2015: 175-200 for the US, and Narotzky 2016 for Europe), by emphasising client-satisfaction metrics rather than learning itself—outcomes that may indeed be contradictory.

Yet most absent from discussions about academic precarity is how academics themselves reproduce precarity—and not just our own, but also that of others.

The privileges and pleasures of academic work often indirectly contribute to the favouring of a certain degree of auto-precarization. It can sometimes be difficult to set limits to activities that are intellectually (and politically) engaging, and that deliver recognition and other pleasures and privileges mentioned above. Yet it is as important to acknowledge our contribution to dragging others into precarity (as a condition of vulnerability not restricted to labour) within and beyond the walls of universities. The precarity of academics can affect students as academics see the time they can dedicate to teaching preparation reduced due to busy schedules and the devaluation of teaching over research. The culture of academia can also become infected by logics of competition activated by precarity—for contracts, resources, permanent positions, research grants, publications, research-only time, and symbolic capital in general. Furthermore, the precarity of academics can impact the people with whom academics engage in their fieldwork: more precarious research often means there is less time to develop and cultivate relationships in the field and the wellbeing of participants in our research. Or it can even affect the fruits of our work, that is, precarious research and conditions of existence of researchers can potentially yield less carefully crafted ethnography.

Our point here is that in order for any action to be taken against increasing precarization, we need to acknowledge the ways in which our own precarity can contribute to that of others or to generating what we call 'chains of precarity'. We believe that acknowledging how forms of precarity are concatenated is essential to enunciating a collective response to precarity in academia—a response that can enable academics to recognize and share with others their own experiences of precarity while becoming aware of their impacts beyond their own life. Because of the concatenated nature of precarization, practices of cooperation are crucial to contesting these processes within the specific and daily situations we encounter in academic, and more generally social, life in which precarization is (re)produced. We therefore call for a collective undoing of these chains of precarity as we fight our own.

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[1] On the notion of 'militant research', see Malo (2004).

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Towards a Transnational Anthropology Union #UniversityCrisis

PrecAnthro
December, 2016

At the last European Association of Social Anthropology ([EASA](#)) meeting, a few of us called an [open meeting for early career and precarious anthropologists to discuss precarity in academia and beyond](#). The call emerged from a number of informal conversations and private/public exchanges (see, e.g., the [exchange on the COMPAS call for 'casual researchers,'](#) and the recent [Guardian report](#) on precarious lecturers), and a shared awareness that, while precarity is on the rise within and beyond anthropology, there is no collective anthropology platform specifically dedicated to it.

The meeting in Milan was an effort to address the projectarization and precarization of anthropologists' working conditions.

It aimed to create a space for early career researchers to collectively explore

possible paths for transnational labour organisation and action, to make our rights visible and our work possible. Here is the original call:

Uncertainty and precarity have long been an integral part of anthropology – part of the excitement, serendipity, danger and thrill of fieldwork and theory. Yet today, most researchers encounter these conditions in more than one way. Many of us are caught in short fixed-term contracts, with limited bargaining power and social security/benefits (often without health insurance, pension, holiday, redundancy, or even maternity/parental leave). We are working under the burden of the 'publish or perish' imperative and have to secure research and teaching experience (sometimes unpaid) while realizing our work benefits not the public, but profit-making universities and publishers. In this meeting we open a collaborative, transnational, and experimental space for early career anthropologists and precarious scholars in order to:

- *discuss the current predicament of the academic profession and differences across multiple contracts and positions and discrepancies between national contexts and transnational schemes (ERC, Marie Curie, etc.), the changing structure of funding and the projectarization of research, labour hierarchies, autonomy and control of knowledge production.*
- *seek possible paths for labour organization and action.*
- *brainstorm around possible ways to collectively intervene and make our rights/entitlements visible.*
- *think of collaborations with already existing networks (EASA, national academic unions...)*

The meeting aims to move beyond self-pity, overcome hyper-fragmentation and fear, and organize collectively before the changes in place make solidarity across positions, contracts, and contexts impossible.

Everybody Welcome!

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the meeting was one of the best-attended EASA2016

events, with more than 150 people participating. A number of topics were discussed, including:

- the seismic rise of precarious teaching and research contracts across Europe
- the radical difference between countries and between contracts, and the detrimental effects this has on the possibility of solidarity, collaboration, and alliance between precarious anthropologists
- the way in which precarity and the requirement of mobility affects personal lives, including the lives of young parents and the balancing of career and caring demands
- the divisions across Europe, where different economic and payment conditions create a reserve army of workers in the East and South available for precarious academic migration to the North and West
- the difficulty in obtaining information – internationally, nationally, and institutionally – about specific contractual arrangements
- the arrangements between research and teaching-replacement staff in large EU-funded projects, where often a race to the bottom is created and reinforced by conditions stipulated by funding agencies and host institutions
- the fact that many institutions, departments, and individual (often precarious) scholars are required to dedicate time and effort to research grants applications, only a small proportion of which will obtain funding
- the difficulty in creating alliances with precarious research and teaching staff from other disciplines, and particularly in the natural sciences
- the hierarchical and personalised structure of most collaborative research projects, which often leaves junior researchers 'dependant' on their project manager/principal investigator/supervisor, and sometimes with limited control or ownership of their own knowledge production
- discrimination surrounding caring responsibilities and maternity
- the need to think beyond Europe, and build alliances with precarious scholars internationally

At the PrecAthro EASA2016 meeting we took three main decisions: (1) present a motion to the EASA Executive Committee regarding the situation of precarious anthropologists, (2) build a collective PrecAnthro platform for communication and action, (3) form working groups to tackle specific issues.

(1) PrecAnthro Motion

PrecAnthro presented a motion to the EASA Executive Committee during the Members' Forum in Milan – here is the text:

We would like EASA members present at this general assembly to consider and support the following motion: **We ask the EASA executive to discuss these points at their next meeting and vote on these proposals.**

Some background first:

On the 22ⁿᵈ of July a meeting took place during the EASA biannual conference.

Organized and attended by precarious anthropologists on PhD, teaching and researchers' contracts, it asked EASA as a professional organization to support the plight of precarious anthropologists in a number of ways.

- *Preparing a declaration in which EASA – acknowledging the overall predicament of the academic profession in the era of advanced capitalism – declares itself against the proliferation of precarity on anthropology departments across Europe and beyond*
- *Updating – with input by those affected – the existing database on number and types of contracts on anthropology departments across Europe in order to better understand the current situation with precarity in the profession*
- *Discussing concrete ways in which the association – with help and input of those affected – can help watchdog efforts and assert influence in clear*

cases of exploitation and proliferation of precarity in departments of anthropology or among members of EASA

- *Creating a policy of good practice in recruitment and employment*
- *Involving precarious academics in the efforts to lobby the European Commission on issues of the structuring requirements and procedures of hiring (of researchers and replacement teaching staff), research, administration and academic production within EU projects*

(2) PrecAnthro platform

A PrecAnthro online platform was set up in August 2016 – below is the link, in addition to our other social media handles:

PrecAnthro Group: precanthro@googlegroups.com

Email: precanthro@gmail.com

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/precanthro

Twitter: #PrecAnthro

PrecAnthro Watchdog Group: precanthro.watchdog@gmail.com

The **PrecAnthro Watchdog Group** deals with particular labour issues demanding urgent collective response. *PrecAnthro* members can report at **precanthro.watchdog@gmail.com** specific irregularities in their working environments, and they can discuss/decide on the most suited *PrecAnthro* intervention. Because of the sensitive nature of these cases and the need for anonymity/trust, all emails received to this account will be treated confidentially.

(3) Working groups

PrecAnthro now has four working groups up and running – If you wish to join one of the working groups, please email (specifying the group) precanthro@gmail.com.

1. **Web platform – social media, press releases.** This group is the 'public face' of *PrecAnthro*'s internal discussions. Right now we run a facebook and a twitter account (with the aim of also creating a blog/website). The aim of this group is to share information about naming-and-shaming precarious positions, articles about precarity among anthropologists and related fields in Europe and beyond, as well as compiling and distributing press-releases on our activities (e.g., responses to articles which mis/represent a specific event/situation, petitions, reporting on successes/failures of struggle against precarity, reporting on precarity-related events).

2. **Policy – recommendations to departments, funders, employers, national unions.** The aim of this group is to collect, discuss, and compile recommendations, guidelines, and 'good practice' advice for departments, funders (e.g., ERC), supervisors and PIs, scholarly organisations (e.g., EASA), national unions, and other bodies who work with precarious scholars (e.g., research and teaching staff on temporary contracts). The aim is both to highlight the situation of precarious scholars and provide practical advice and critical solutions – in the short and the long term.

3. **Research – database on precarity & existing struggles.** This group is responsible for gathering information regarding at least two domains: first, the labour conditions of precarious anthropologists in various departments/projects in Europe; and, second, existing unionizing and struggles around relevant labour issues. The ultimate goal is to create a database that will directly feed our watchdog and policy activities, and inform possibilities of collaboration with other networks/struggles.

4. **Ethics – ethics of PrecAnthro on research, participation, etc.** This group will work closely with other working groups responding to their

needs for developing procedural and ethical standards. These can range from suggesting ways to handle confidential issues, e.g., through elaborating guidelines for using the PrecAnthro mailing list, to facilitating discussions around and drafting bylaws for the union. The group will also be reflecting on effective ways to store, preserve and share documents produced for internal use (e.g., research protocols), and will be attending individual members' complaints about ethical and procedural shortcomings.

PreAnthro is a collective, experimental, and open endeavour – join us, invite your colleagues, spread the word, and join the struggle!

Featured image by Beth Scupham (flickr, CC BY 2.0)

RECLAIMING THE UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

Tim Ingold
December, 2016

Universities are in turmoil. There was a time when they stood out as pinnacles of Enlightenment, where scholarly elites could profess to a superior knowledge, based on reason and evidence, of the ways of the world. Their mission was to educate, to spread the light of learning to all nations, and to deliver their citizens from ignorance, poverty and subjugation. Chauvinistic they may have been, but these were progressive aspirations backed by a conviction of common human potential.

Like it or not, however, the Enlightenment programme has more or less collapsed, along with the powers that sustained it.

These were the historic powers of European-led colonisation, by which the allegedly superior ways of knowing of dominant nations were imposed upon

subaltern populations. In our post-colonial world, the hierarchies of knowledge that once propped up the academy's claim to superiority have crumbled. And as tends to happen at such moments, far from reaching an accommodation that would open up the correspondences of life to other ways of knowing and being, and to voices previously muted or suppressed, we are witnessing just the opposite, with the emergence on all sides of closed and self-righteous fundamentalisms, whether religious, political or economic. The world is becoming an increasingly dangerous place.

Beset by weak and compliant leadership, universities present soft targets for hostile takeover, whether by multinational corporations wedded to the doctrines of neoliberalism, by totalitarian regimes bent on the suppression of critical inquiry or by sectarian organisations aiming to spread their own particular versions of bigotry and intolerance. In this situation, it is imperative for universities to redefine their purpose. They can no longer take refuge behind self-serving appeals to academic immunity that have ceased to have any traction beyond their ivory towers, nor can they surrender to the profoundly anti-democratic forces that threaten their very existence. Fatuous mission statements merely paper over the abject failure of university leaders to address the question of what universities are for, with the depth and seriousness it deserves.

For in our present global predicament, universities do indeed have a new and critical role to play. It is to bring people of all ages together, across many forms of difference, and to establish an ecumenical environment in which these differences can be aired and debated in a spirit of tolerance, justice and common humanity.

Only by doing so can we begin to forge a world fit for coming generations to inhabit. No task is more important, and apart from universities, no other institutions currently exist to undertake it.

There is very little sign, however, that the regimes of management which have arrogated to themselves the business of controlling our universities have the

slightest grasp of the issues at stake. Their myopic vision is circumscribed by crude indices of rank and productivity. We cannot wait for them to rise to a challenge they do not even recognise. Here at the University of Aberdeen, however, we have taken matters into our own hands by establishing an inclusive movement of scholars, students, staff and alumni under the banner 'Reclaiming our University'. The movement was launched with an open meeting on October 15th, 2015. Throughout 2015-16 we held a series of seminars to debate what emerged from that meeting as the four pillars of the university:

freedom, trust, education and community.

How can we define academic freedom as a task freighted with responsibility, rather than a right that relieves us of it? How can trust carry the weight of expectation we place on staff and students? What is the meaning of 'education' in higher education, and does it mean the same as 'teaching and learning'? How can we create a sense of community and common purpose across departments and disciplines whose interests and ways of working are so different? And above all, what is our University for, and to what ideals should it aspire?

All these discussions – sometimes heated, always constructive – eventually led us to draft a manifesto for 'Reclaiming our University', structured around these four

pillars. Following a meeting on October 6th, 2016, the text of the manifesto has been finalised, and it is now being printed. You can read it [here](). The manifesto was recently launched at a public event on November 25th. Our purpose in writing it was not primarily to critique the existing state of affairs in the University. Everyone knows that it is going through bad times, and the reasons for this are well understood. We wanted to take a more constructive approach, namely, to set out a coherent vision for what our University could and should be. What we present in the manifesto, then, are a set of guiding principles. We are under no illusions. These principles are in many instances so much at variance with current orthodoxy that they may take years, if not decades, to implement. Nevertheless our aim is to have them adopted, by the Senate, as guidelines for the future development of the University. However long it takes to get there, we will at least have some directions to follow. And our hope is that if we can do it, then our colleagues in other institutions, even in other countries, will be inspired to follow suit.

Though 'Reclaiming' is for everyone, whatever their discipline, it is no accident that the movement took root in a department of anthropology, and that anthropologists have been at the forefront in taking it forward.

For despite its origins in the Enlightenment project and its early implication in regimes of colonial domination, no discipline has done more over the past several decades to expose the power relations that underpin traditional hierarchies of knowledge, or to question the claims of universal reason and empirical objectivity upon which they rest.

Indeed, in devoting so much of its energy to challenging the legitimacy of these hierarchies, and to demonstrating the force and integrity of ways of knowing rooted in diverse practices of ordinary life, anthropology has showed its capacity to be the most virulently anti-academic of academic disciplines. Yet for the most part, anthropologists remain tied to an academic model of knowledge production according to which lessons learned in the field, through observation and practical

participation, are recast as data for ethnographic analysis. For the discipline to realise its true emancipatory potential we need to take one further step, beyond ethnography, to recognise that anthropology is not so much the study *of* others as a way of studying *with* them, in order that together, we can better explore the conditions and possibilities of life (and not just human life) in the one world we all inhabit.

No one can doubt that the organisations of production, distribution, governance and knowledge that have dominated the modern era have brought the world to the brink of catastrophe. In finding ways to carry on, we need all the help we can get. Whether we agree with them or not, we cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to what others have to tell us, whatever their profession, creed or walk of life. Nor is it enough just to understand or interpret what they have to say, by embedding it in its social, cultural or historical context. We must bring others into our presence so that we can learn from them, argue with them and debate with them, just as they can learn from, argue and debate with us. That's the way to forge a common future. But this, too, is surely the way of the coming university: to bring people together and debate their differences in a spirit of tolerance and inclusiveness.

The future for anthropology, in short, is nothing less than the future for the university.

What we want for the university is what we want for anthropology, and our discipline will be at the heart of it. No other discipline in the academic pantheon is better placed to point the way toward a sustainable world that will have a place for everyone. But unless we reform the university, and with it the discipline of anthropology, both will sink together, along with the manifestly unsustainable world order to which they currently belong.

Featured image (cropped) by Gordon Robertson (flickr, CC BY 2.0)

Counting our Losses: Reflections from a Newton Fund/British Council Workshop on Loss and Displacement

Fiona Murphy
December, 2016

The past is irrecoverable and the past is not past; the past is the resource for the

future and the future is the redemption of the past; loss must be marked and it cannot be represented; loss fractures representation itself and loss precipitates its own modes of expression. [(Butler 2003, 467)](#)

[Aydin Mehmet Ali](#) *(a Turkish Cypriot long time British National) writer stands at the top of a seminar room in a London University on a warm September's day reading extracts from stories which are borne from loss. A group of early career academics sit in a circle entranced by the immediacy of Aydin's writing, they are tired from a long day discussing loss but Aydin's stories stir us into being. We hear snippets and extracts from across Aydin's work, but one extract lingers. Aydin reads from a story called* **[Forbidden Zone](#)**:

> *'He dragged her into the night. A light elegant little thing she was. Like a bird. Young, barely in her mid-twenties. I heard him shout like a wounded animal, "Mariaaa… Mariaaa…" as they dragged her from the car. She was wearing a light blue sleeveless dress. You know, it was a hot summer… '74. And she was beautifully tanned, with dark hair down to her shoulders…' He pinches his lower lip and bites the tip of his thumbnail. He looks up, 'You should've seen what he did to her […]. (2011: 197)'*

This is a story of rape, of trauma, of suffering, but also one of loss. Aydin finishes reading, but her stories travel with us into the evening giving us a fuller realisation of the importance of the goals of our coming together. (Workshop reflection, 2016).

In September 2016, a group of academics from British and Turkish Universities gathered together in Camden, London to discuss the complexities of loss and displacement with a particular focus on Turkey. Funded by the [British Council Newton Fund](#), the workshop was a collaboration between the [Senator George J. Mitchell Institute for Global Peace, Security and Justice](#) and [Anthropology at Queen's University Belfast](#) and [Bilgi University in Istanbul](#). The aim of the particular grant was to promote researcher links between the UK and Turkey and to contribute to research and skills training of early career researchers. The

inspiration for this workshop came from the organisers' ([Ulrike Vieten](#) QUB), [Ilay Romain Ors](#) (Bilgi), [Evi Chatzipanagiotidou](#) (QUB), [Omer Turan (Bilgi)](#) and [Fiona Murphy (QUB))](#) research interests in the politics of mobility and global crisis-scapes of austerity, borders, climate change and conflict. The main motive for organising this workshop was a recognition amongst us of how a 'politics of loss' figures large within these intersecting [crisis-scapes.](#)

Inspired by such questions as how an analysis of 'loss' might lead to a better understanding of displacement in contemporary and historical perspectives, and thus connect to issues of social transformation and justice, we gathered together a range of participants working on these thematics through a cross-disciplinary lens. As Turkey has been at the centre of political processes and public debates around displacement, not least because of the flows of Syrian refugees to and through the country, it proved to be an important field of reflection on the politics of loss and displacement. While the majority of the workshop was dedicated to the Turkish context, on the final day, we also looked at work from South Africa, Poland and the UK. Over the next few days, our Allegra friends have given us the opportunity to bring some of our discussions to you, the Allegra readership. We do this in the spirit of bringing at least some of the learnings of an intimate workshop to a broader thinking public, and welcome any engagement on the topic.

The opening part of our workshop was dedicated to thinking through how the main thematics -loss and displacement- are currently being articulated in scholarly literature and beyond. How loss can be rendered understandable in both scholarly and applied contexts was key in this discussion. As 'loss' is one of the leitmotifs of the contemporary moment -particularly with respect to displacement- this is a particularly urgent task. Accessing loss as an 'object' of study but also as a method of analysis is a complex task, but one which we undertook with gravity for the duration of our collaborative workshop. In what are challenging times for Turkey and in spite of them, our discussions about the connections between loss and displacement engendered an ethic of responsibility, sustainability, renewal and hopefulness.

Together we constructed a reading of loss as it is situated in both its psychological construction as a form of mourning, melancholia, nostalgia, sadness and depression and within a social scientific frame as contested sets of relations and structures of feeling in historical, economic and socio-political processes (see also Eng and Kazanjian 2003).

We agreed through our various case studies and analyses that understanding loss through what remains -the traces or remnants- is an important place to begin (see also Eng and Kazanjian 2003).

We also asked a number of questions such as: How can we understand the lived experience of loss in the context of displacement? What forms of agency and belonging have been engendered through the politicisation of loss? How is loss differently felt, imagined, negotiated, and engaged with in different displacement contexts and experiences? What implications does this have in both practical and theoretical terms? Indeed, after three days of engaged discussions and rich papers, we managed to combine forces analytically, intellectually and politically to move our interest in 'loss' from a signifying trope into a broader interdisciplinary 'field' of study through the diversity of our research..

We focused on migration and displacement as significant forces of social change and transformation historically and at present. Displacement was defined in the workshop in a broad sense, including conflict induced displacement across borders, internal displacement due to political, social and economic processes, displacement as a result of gentrification and spatial transformation.

However, displacement does not always involve movement or mobility.

It also relates to a state of being 'out of place' without having moved, when, for instance, communities dissolve or become attacked through particular state-building projects or exclusionary and silencing agendas.

The theoretical and empirical connections of 'loss' to the analysis of migration and displacement are not new and they have been constructed in a variety of thematic fields in and beyond Anthropology. For one, diasporas have been largely defined by 'what is left behind' and notions of *nostalgia* and longing, which constitute significant elements of loss. Conflict-induced displacement and its effects have also been analysed through related concepts. Talking about Cyprus, [Navaro-Yashin (2009)](#) focuses on melancholia (*maraz* in Turkish) as an affective condition of loss and mourning that Turkish Cypriots endure in the Northern part of the island. *Maraz* does not only become an emotive reaction to what was lost after Turkish Cypriots were displaced from their properties due to inter-communal conflict and war but also an emotive relation to 'what remains': the houses, land and objects Greek Cypriot refugees have left behind and with/in which Turkish Cypriot now have to live. More broadly,

> *'loss' becomes a lens to consider the individual and collective emotional, political, socio-cultural, economic and legal articulations and implications of mobility.*

One of the aims of the workshop was therefore to trace the links between 'loss', migration and displacement that have emerged in different literatures and empirical contexts. We also asked whether current and new cycles of displacement can still be usefully understood through this prism. At the same time, we wanted to examine continuities between current conditions of displacement, such as the forced migration of Syrian refugees, with other periods and types of loss within and outside Turkey and the Ottoman Empire, including the losses experienced by Turkey's Kurdish population. A major question that emerged was about whether we need to think newly about the types of losses that we are examining in these current contexts or to what extent we are talking about

new losses altogether. We discussed examples and theories of how loss is produced and how its theorisations can help us not only to describe displacement and mobility but also to understand the political, social and cultural conditions in which they are (re)produced and experienced. Ultimately, this pushed us to debate how loss can help us connect current experiences of displacement not only to multiple pasts but also to potential -imagined or not- futures.

The workshop was divided into a number of important thematics such as 'Minorities, Belonging and Justice', 'State-building, displacement and diasporas', 'Gendered loss', 'Border transformation and social change', 'Narratives, memories and emotions'. Papers focused thus on minority groups (Turkish minorities in Greece and Greek minorities in Turkey for example), the relationship of Turkish Kurds to the Kurdish state, Turkish Kurdish diasporas in the UK, Syrian refugees in Turkey, as well as work on archaeology, heritage and artistic spaces in Turkey. The final day papers moved us outside of Turkey into a broader reading of loss and displacement in contexts such as South Africa, Poland and the UK.

This week for the thematic week on loss, five of our workshop participants will be blogging about their work and their participation in the workshop. This is just a taste of what the larger essence of our workshop entailed but we are delighted to be able to share the creativity and passion with which our participants approach their work. Tomorrow's blog is by [Charlotte Hamid](#) entitled *'Loss in times of revolution and exile'.* This is a contribution solidly anchored in the freshness of

having just returned from what is important and challenging fieldwork. Charlotte shares the voices and stories of her Syrian interlocutors in a way which encourages reflection and action. The following day we hear from two of our participants: [Ipek Demir](#) in an eloquent reflection entitled *'From self-identified 'Turkish migrants' to 'Kurdish Diaspora''* in London speaks about her intellectual engagement with loss through her career, and how it works in conjunction with a theory of ignorance to understand what Ipek calls the 'de-turkification' of Kurdish diasporic communities living in London. This reflection is followed by the very personal and emotive childhood tale by [Mehmet Kurt](#). Entitled *'A Tale of Two Stones'* Mehmet takes us on an emotionally charged journey into his past to reflect on how the vagaries of loss have shaped his life course as a member of the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Day four sees [Samuel Hardy](#) present us with the complexities of archaeology as a discipline alongside the employment difficulties archaeologists face in Turkey in a post entitled **'***Urban development and the resistance of archaeology*'*.* Sam's blog provides a critical reflection on how bound up archaeology in Turkey is with the vagaries of loss. Finally, we close with a reflection from [Dalene Swanson](#) who in her post entitled *'No wall to lean on'* weaves together some of the critical aspects of the workshop by mapping the connections between crisis, loss and *UBUNTU.* Dalene closes this thematic week for us by reminding us that through all the complexities of understanding loss and displacement, we must indeed remember the urgent need to respond to such issues as compassionately and as humanely as possible. It is indeed this that we hoped for most in our bringing together a collective striving to understand loss and displacement.

NO WALL TO LEAN ON

Dalene Swanson
December, 2016

By Dalene Swanson.

Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?... Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure. (Judith Butler 2004, 20)

Modernity as crisis

The development theorist, Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2010), asserted that

development and crisis worked together to (re)produce each other; that modernist development was a condition of crisis. Global crises have regional specificity and situated historical realisations across the globe. As such, political conflict has its flashpoints in particular places where ecological, geo-political and economic vulnerabilities reveal levels of political intractability, and these particularised conflicts have real material effects on lives and deaths, landscapes, ecologies, communities, identities, histories, and future limitations and possibilities. But, they are also a reflection of the state of things at the core, at the very centre.

The wrenched historiographies of refugees of regional wars, local conflict, extreme poverty, and ecological devastation, exemplify the embodied materialising of such devastations, through the marking of land, bodies and space, in ways that effect the perforating of borders and shredding of global imaginaries of State and statehood. As such, these local or regional crises are nodal of larger complexes that are relationally intoned and inextricably intertwined.

In this sense, they are local emergences of global emergencies.

Crisis within crisis

Yet, global crisis doesn't only reveal itself in 'emergencies' as flashpoints of conflict that often transmute into the realm of hyper-realities of social media, but can be part of the slow structural violences (Galtung, 1969) of the quotidian, an always-already 'banality of evil' (Arendt, 1964) of the everyday played out in local contexts of development devastation and economic, military and socio-political imperialism throughout the globe. The normalisation of crumbling social structures below the normalised, dominant discourses of economic development, and the always-already ruins of empire, are indeed their own crises of modernity hidden within: a crisis *within* crisis, a crisis *of* crisis.

The Politics of Loss workshop

The *British Council* researcher links workshop in London on the *Politics of Loss*, from 7-9 September 2016, was an opportunity to connect, debate, challenge ideas and share research with our Turkish colleagues working on refugee, asylum and displacement issues in the Turkish / Syrian borderlands and Mediterranean. It was an opportunity to express moral outrage and collective commitments against severe injustice perpetrated against those displaced by Middle Eastern and North African wars and extreme poverty. And it was an opportunity to share in our mutual humanity as well. The undulations in the range of affective responses inflected the mood of the debates that were a constant recognition of the multiply-intertwined crises of injustice that is our current global political condition.

Ubuntu onto-epistemology

Recognising, as Bhambra (2016) does, that the crisis of postcolonial modernity is not a condition external to Euro-centred political structures, but a reflection of the crisis *internal* to the very structures that are the edifices of modernity themselves. Crisis as internally relational and endogenous to the systems of modernity that work to produce and are produced by its frames of war (Butler, 2009) is concomitant with the thinking that Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

(who recently celebrated his 85th birthday) brings to the sub-Saharan onto-epistemology of *Ubuntu*, (and which I have focussed on in some of my own work: Swanson, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2015b). In his book, *[No Future Without Forgiveness,](link)* reflecting his embrace of *Ubuntu* in leading the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in postapartheid South Africa, Tutu tells us:

"A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are."

In our response to the plight of displaced Syrians and North Africans seeking refuge in Turkey and Europe, in *Ubuntu* terms we need understand that indifference to the dispossessed is the dispossession of our collective humanity, of what makes us human.

No wall to lean on

Occasionally, there is something in a narrative related to us that holds our attention, even as it appears so insignificant. This was the case of a narrative shared by one of my Turkish colleagues at the *Politics of Loss* research workshop. She told us about her interview with an old Syrian man in a Turkish refugee camp. She expressed her surprise at the simplicity of his answer when she asked him: "what do you miss the most about your home back in Syria?" His answer was not a dramatic response as might have been expected under the circumstances. It was not reflective of severe trauma or extreme suffering. It was a *simple suffering,* borne from a long-endured tiredness: "Because we are housed in tents", he related in his own words, "I miss being able to sit and lean against a wall".

The Syrian refugee crisis is not a dramatic emergency played out from an external horizon, one that is impinging on an epistemologically coherent and sophisticated European modernity. The tired edifices of the global social imaginaries of empire and modernity are crumbling, or may even have been crumbling from their inception. They are a mark not of crises as external dramatic events or as external assaults on the centre, but of the quiet, simple, slow structural violence that *is* (at) the centre of things. We all, too, have no wall to lean on … but each other.

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Urban development and the resistance of archaeology

Sam Hardy
December, 2016

By some estimates, one in ten thousand people in Turkey is an unemployed archaeologist. In an alternative café while on a last-minute contract in Istanbul, I got talking to someone and found out that he was one too. We laughed that we were there because neither one of us could find work as an archaeologist. However, that meeting is not as unlikely as it sounds, because archaeological (un)employment in Turkey is more political than economic.

An ethical and legal component of urban development, archaeology is bound up with both displacement and resistance against loss.

In 2012, tourism generated 23,000,000,000 lira; and revenues directly from cultural heritage sites were 280,000,000 lira; yet the budget for archaeology was 23,000,000 lira. This cut-price revenue-raising is built into the structure of

professional training, as perhaps six or eight thousand student archaeologists perform extensive excavations as part of their degrees (two thousand a year in four-year courses). When they graduate, much of the labour that they could provide is instead provided by their "successors". As documented by Radikal journalist Ömer Erbil, already *before* the Gezi uprising, archaeologists had 'rebelled [isyan etti]'.

And such a revolt was only one crest in converging waves of movement that flowed from attempts to prevent or mitigate displacement and destruction in works for Uzunçayır Reservoir, Pembelik Dam and Uzunçayır Dam in the Southeast, for the renovation of Sulukule in Istanbul and for the development of the historic environment more generally.

> *In these infrastructural projects and gentrification processes, the law was often bent or broken or retroactively legalised by the state.*

One of the essential acts of lawfare was the exclusion of archaeologists from work, the prevention of archaeologists' fulfilment of their professional and legal responsibilities, because such work would preserve the memory of politically inconvenient communities and histories. Through all of these struggles, solidarities and alliances were forged amongst environmental activists, cultural heritage professionals (from archaeologists to architects) and affected communities.

These and even more struggles came together in Gezi Park (and the adjacent Taksim Square), the focal point of the nationwide Gezi uprising.

There, archaeology graduates with no future, whose professional experience had instilled economic and political empathy, found common cause with other resisters. They sought to prevent the loss of Armenian cultural heritage, the displacement of vulnerable minority communities and the neoliberal Islamist movement's architectural conquest of a secularist space that is a historic site of anti-capitalist struggle. They explicitly sought to resist the destruction of the

cultural heritage of Kurds, Alevis and other minority communities across Turkey, and the [achievement of that destruction through the suppression of their profession](#).

[Featured image](#) by [Adam](#) (flickr, [CC BY 2.0](#))

A Story of Two Stones

Mehmet Kurt
December, 2016

On a cold December day in 1995, after finishing my daily studies as a junior high school student, I was trying to catch the bus to go back to my village fifteen miles away from the city and located on the Turkish border with Syria. An elder acquaintance of mine asked me where I was going. I replied that I was heading home, to my village. He then told me "Your house is not in that village anymore. Your family had to move to the city this morning."

During the civil war between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the early 1990s, Emergency State Rule was declared and resulted in millions of Kurds being displaced into the metropolitan areas of Turkey.

They suffered from discrimination, ethnic violence and unemployment, while their

land and property were appropriated by the state-appointed "village guards" (a pro-government Kurdish militia). Pressure from the European Union eventually forced Turkey to enact a "law of resettlement" in 2004. As a result, around 200,000 Kurds returned to their villages, while some, often younger, family members remained in the cities.

I was one of those who remained in the city. Overall, there was nothing to do in the village for me. It was a place of old memories and a childhood that I left behind on a cold day of December, in 1995. As a child in the village, we had many children games, which we would play with stones and sticks. There was a game, Kûç, which I was really good at. Flat stones were the necessary component of the game and I had the best stones that all children aspired to have in the village. I had found them in a river base in a valley nearby and had to hide them from my parents who were not happy that I would spend all my day playing. My stash was beneath a rock next to the road towards the mountains.

After being displaced from the village and spending many years away, I could not resist wondering whether my two flat stones still are in my stash.

In 2004, the year I finished my undergraduate degree, I decided to go back and check my stones. My first impression of the village was devastating. Everything looked very small; houses, alleys, the distance to my elementary school located on the edge of the village.

Everything I thought of as big and magnificent in my imagination was tiny and unimportant. Except the road! The government had expanded the road towards the mountains for military transportation for a newly founded headquarters. There was no rock, no stones, and no old memories of my childhood. My two stones were probably buried under asphalt. I left disappointed and never went back again until 2013, when my American partner visited me in my hometown and wanted to see the house of my childhood.

The house was even smaller than what I had remembered and there was a

displaced Syrian family living in the house. No man! a woman, a young girl and two boys playing Kûç in the courtyard. It brought back all forgotten memories of my childhood and soon after I found myself playing with them.

Then I started to collect stones from all around the world and store them in my bookshelves.

Featured image (cropped) by Marco / Zak (flickr, CC BY-ND 2.0)

From self-identified 'Turkish migrants' to 'Kurdish Diaspora' in London

Ipek Demir
December, 2016

Loss and its relationship to translation and incommensurability have been central features of my work. My interdisciplinary PhD (Social and Political Thought, Sussex) and Post-doc (HPS, Cambridge) examined the relationship between tradition, translation and incommensurability. In subsequent years I investigated the theoretical and philosophical dimensions of translation, border-making, and conflict across the boundaries of knowledge communities as well as researching and publishing on interdisciplinarity, trust, loss in knowledge and data-sharing. For example I examined losses in the movement of ideas and practices across time (2011) and problems of incommensurability in data sharing (2013).

In the last six years, I have also developed an expertise in the field of diaspora studies, transnationalism and Kurdish studies by using the conceptual tools and insight on translation and conflict which my PhD and post-doc at Cambridge provided.

My current work sits at the intersections of the fields of diaspora studies, ethno-politics, race and identity, indigeneity, global politics as well as social and critical thought.

I am particularly interested in the notion of 'loss' as it complements as well as challenges my expertise on translation, in particular the under-researched relationship between 'ignorance', 'strategies of inclusion and exclusion' and 'loss' in the translation of ethno-political identity in diaspora. As will be outlined below, my paper at the loss workshop brought these concepts together.

The intrigues of diasporic identity have been at the forefront of research in the last decades, awakening interest across various disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, geography and literature.

Research on diasporas, however, has tended to focus on, and perhaps over-emphasise tirelessly, how diasporas create 'hybrid' and 'creole' identities and/or ambiguous belonging ties.

My interest in 'loss' stems from the findings of my ethnographic research which highlights 'shedding' of Turkification by Kurds in London. In other words, my work traces how ethno-political identities brought from home are consciously shed and lost. Whilst loss is typically understood as a process which is passive, docile and out of one's control, my conceptualization aims to demonstrate how agency and active mobilization should also be at the heart of our understandings of loss, including how loss is experienced, negotiated and enacted.

In my paper at the [British Council Newton](#) supported 'loss workshop' I discussed how Kurdish diaspora in London engage in de-Turkification, that is correcting, interrupting and shedding the intense Turkification and assimilation which Kurds have been recipients of in Turkey. My ethnographic data reveals that as 'everyday critical discourse analysts' Kurdish mobilized actors identify, challenge and unpack ideologically the Turkishness manifest in their (Kurdish) interlocutors'

discourses. They subvert conversations, interrupt, and correct the erasures and injustices they see being sustained in the discourses of politically less aware Kurds. A la [Spivak](#), they *un*sanction ignorance, exposing and correcting acquiesced patterns of Turkified discourses, interrupting not only 'ignorant ignorance' but also 'learned ignorance' [(Santos 2009)](#). The paper examined how ethnic conflict at home has shifted self-definition amongst Kurds in London as previously self-identified 'Turkish economic migrants' have become self-identified 'Kurdish diaspora' over time (Demir forthcoming 2017).

As such my paper attempts to make an epistemological intervention into the ways in which loss is understood and articulated in diaspora. As my data identifies, whilst Turkification is proactively abandoned, Turkey is not; the lure of Turkey still persists amongst diasporic Kurds whilst Turkification is actively challenged and shed.