The Spider

Judith Beyer
September, 2015

The thought crept into my mind today and refused to let go of my brain. It said 'What if we have no f*ing clue?' Going to bed with images of crying fathers holding their children – 'Are they dead? Oh thank God, only sleeping!' – , waking up with stories of rotten bodies, locked into a van used for transporting poultry. Heaps of rotten meat. This is not happening in Syria. This is Syria happening in Europe. Those who survived are here. But what if the war that was carried out on their backs will follow them?

> *Did it ever occur to you that Europe is not facing a 'refugee crisis' but is already part and parcel of several wars that have forced hundreds of thousands of human beings – like you, like me – to leave everything behind to save bare life?*

Their crisis is our crisis, but we don't pay the price yet that they have already paid. But we might, if we don't act.

I feel I am responsible at least in part for their desperation. Because as a German citizen I have voted for a certain party, have legitimized a certain type of government, because my taxes are used in ways I cannot control any more. Because I live in an area of Germany, which is profiting from the military industry that is located all around me; that exports weapons, drones and military equipment to I don't know where. The thing is, there are people who do know, who are responsible, who profit, who might even believe that this is needed for 'security', 'stability' or – probably the most honest reason – because a lot of German citizens earn their money with these kinds of endeavours.

Recent demonstration in Constance, Germany against the

military industry located on the shores of Lake Constance in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. Photo credit: Felix Girke

This morning at a local farmer's market in my small picturesque town in Germany an elderly woman approached the mostly well-off clientele with a request to donate whatever they could afford for "refugees from Syria". She offered small bouquets of rosemary in return which she had collected from her garden, I overheard. I felt anger. In fact, I became so angry, I had to turn away. What made me angry was not her compassion and her initiative of wanting to 'do something'. Where would we be without people like her? Or so many others in Greece, Italy, Jordan, Serbia – all devoting their lives to ease the suffering of thousands. My current anger is directed towards the nebulous 'system', towards 'those in power' whom I consider responsible … but how do you hold 'them' accountable? There is no way to trace the origin of a 'crisis', which has reached the scale of what we are witnessing right now, everyday. How can you prevent our grandchildren from accusing us that 'they knew, but they did not do anything' – Germany has been there before.

So what to do? Donate money, children's clothes and food products? Check. Write letters to politicians? Check. Be thankful for every calm and sunny summer day and hug your own child a little longer? Check. But still. The thought won't go away: We have no f*ing clue how to make this stop.

Looking outside my window, I see a large spider spinning its web, waiting patiently for prey. I still want to believe we are not trapped. We are the net.


The Reappeared: Argentine Former Political Prisoners

Freek Van der Vet
September, 2015

States resort to disappearances to remove unwanted critics or minorities from society. The act of a disappearance often follows a pattern: a group of masked armed men take a person to a secret detention facility, usually in the trunk of a car. After losing their liberty, the disappeared rarely have access to independent legal representation, are tortured, isolated, subject to mock-executions, and then executed without a trial. The disappeared vanish in mass graves. The state seldom returns bodily remains to the relatives.

States deny their own involvement in disappearances. No official records are kept of the existence of detention facilities. Law enforcement agents seldom finalise an investigation into a disappearance. As a consequence, the family members of the disappeared rarely receive information on the well-being or whereabouts of their missing relatives. This often leaves them in a state of uncertainty: they cannot mourn, nor can they hope for a sign of life (Robins 2010). It therefore comes as no surprise that most organisations dealing with disappearances are comprised of family members of the disappeared. They try to find remedies, advocate for criminal investigations, seek state accountability, or hope to get access to police files.
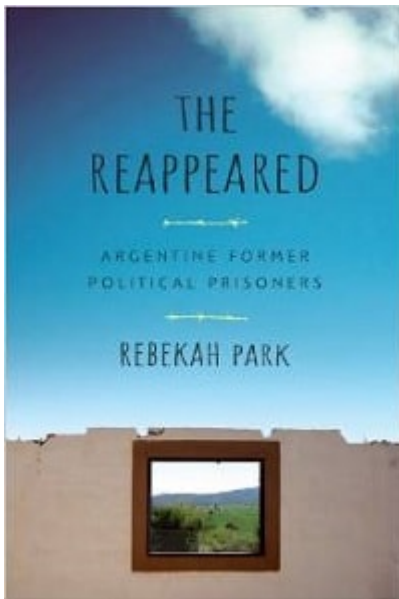
Disappearances happen across the world, yet when thinking of disappearances most people would conjure the disappearances that occurred during the Dirty War in Argentina between 1976 and 1983. During those years 30,000 activists and members of labour unions were abducted and never seen again (Park 2014: 1). Many babies born in prison were taken away to be illegally adopted by members of the political elite (Park 2014: 11). Most associations working to retrieve information on the disappeared in Argentina are family-based, such as the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Both organisations received wide attention from academics interested in transitional justice and truth commissions in Latin America (see, for instance, Arditti 1999).

In fact, one could say that the field of studies on Argentina's Dirty War and the transitional justice period following it has saturated. Yet, Rebekah Park's The Reappeared: Argentine Former Political Prisoners makes a very welcome contribution to this field by revealing the ultimate limits of how human rights can protect former political prisoners and victims. Park conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork and oral-history archive interviews among groups of former political prisoners who were imprisoned during the military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. These prisoners were released and established several organisations to represent their needs and memories. Park especially focuses on the work and members of the AEPPC (Association of Former Political Prisoners in Córdoba) and at tours around concentration camps now opened to the public as memorial sites.

The Reappeared turns our beliefs of victimhood upside down. Who qualifies as a victim in transitional justice mechanisms? Park argues that victims are unequal and legal rights can only do so much to protect them.

Owing to the wider visibility of family organisations, the literature on disappearances has often focused on how transitional justice (traditionally, criminal prosecution and truth seeking through official truth commissions) and legal rights can provide remedies and "truth" for the family members who stay behind (Robins 2012). In contrast, Park reveals that not every victim earns human rights protection: human rights organisations have a strong say in obscuring who can be defined a victim and who cannot.

This inequality began at the start of the transitional justice mechanisms in the 1980s. President Raúl Alfonsín started the transitional justice process in 1983 with the establishment of the CONADEP truth commission (Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas) to collect victim's stories and publish a report on the military dictatorship. During CONADEP's hearings of victims, former political prisoners who survived the camps only played a marginal role as witnesses (Park 2014). While we would expect that those political prisoners who were lucky enough to survive the concentration camps and reappear into Argentinian society would be seen as victims who could provide valuable stories, they faced a cold welcome. The former prisoners were not seen as victims, but were suspected of being potential criminals who had struck a deal in prison so they would be released; probably at the expense of other prisoners who did not survive (p.23). Consequently, most of the former prisoners lost their status as victims.

Park details how former political prisoners also see differences amongst themselves in terms of surviving, collaboration, and captivity. By comparing tours at two former prison sites (one given by former political prisoners and the other by students), Park distinguishes two distinct ways of memorialising space. The tours given by the students focused on human rights violations and the experience of the prisoners and their dehumanization. These tours "reinforced the image of the disappeared as heroic martyrs, or as innocent victims" (p.53). On the other hand, the tours by the former prisoners were, for some, a way of reclaiming their own memories within the space of the prison (p.67). Moreover, the narrative of these tours did not intend to portray prisoners as victims but gave a more

complete picture of personal histories, by including stories on their involvement in social movements and political activism.

> *The former prisoners in part resist the victim label. The political prisoners reclaim their own agency by telling "memories of resistance" and holding on to their political activism during court trials and during their captivity. They avoid telling "memories of torture" in which they become passive victims (p.13).*

For instance, the former prisoners tell how they denied accusations during torture sessions or summoned the willpower to forget names so as not to betray anybody (p.83). Another act of resistance was building a community, and sharing moral support and small resources such as soap within the prison (p.90–91). Many of the former prisoners also decided not to speak of torture, even to the extent of refusing free therapeutic aid from psychologists (p.71).

Park finds that the identity of the ex-prisoners is bifurcated: while the former prisoners lobby for reparations for their suffering with state officials, they also deny that they were psychologically affected by their suffering during oral history archive interviews (p.72). Park reveals an interesting paradox between responsibility and agency: when labelled as victims the prisoners lose part of their agency, yet when they reclaim their agency as activists inside the prison "families of the disappeared are left to wonder: what did they do to survive? Conversely, what did they not do that could have enabled others to survive" (p.21)?

> *The Reappeared is human rights ethnography at its best. Park does a wonderful job by carefully balancing empathy for the personal activist histories of the former prisoners while at the same time providing a critical account of the paradoxes within their narratives. The book shows engagement with the people under study, but the overall tone of the book is critical: laying bare the inconsistencies of victimhood and refusing to sing the praises of human rights as the panacea for grievances.*

Noteworthy is Park's ability to navigate the political sensitivities and conflicts within the Argentinean human rights community. Her way of getting access to the political prisoner's organisations proved to be difficult at first as contact with one organisation could have limited contact with others. What is more, Park balances between describing the often intense stories of survival, anger, depression, and heated arguments without sentimentality, instead showing how the former prisoners seek a more positive story of themselves through resistance and activism.

The book gives a detailed account of life inside the concentration camps and the various tactics of resistance and communication between prisoners. Park broadens our understanding of what constitutes as a violation by including the socio-economic hardships following the event of a violation. While the protection of civil rights receives widespread attention, the socio-economic discrimination and exclusion from society of survivors is often overlooked (p.147; see also Robins 2012). Even after their degrading experiences in prison, the former prisoners experienced socio-economic exclusion: they lost partnerships, had to rebuild their families, and had difficulties finding employment (p.109). This all makes The Reappeared a welcome wakeup call from our dream that human rights can protect all victims equally at all times and that transitional justice mechanisms can provide sufficient redress for survivors.

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time to csángó

Ian M. Cook
September, 2015

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YAM7IYFpqY

Time to Csángó, a creative short documentary by Hadas Bar, Ian Cook, Anette Dujisin, explores the popularity of the táncház (dance house) movement in Budapest, Hungary, especially csángó music and dance. Csángó people are a Hungarian speaking minority residing in the Romanian region Moldavia, especially Bacău County.

EVENTS between beauty, art and more

Allegra
September, 2015
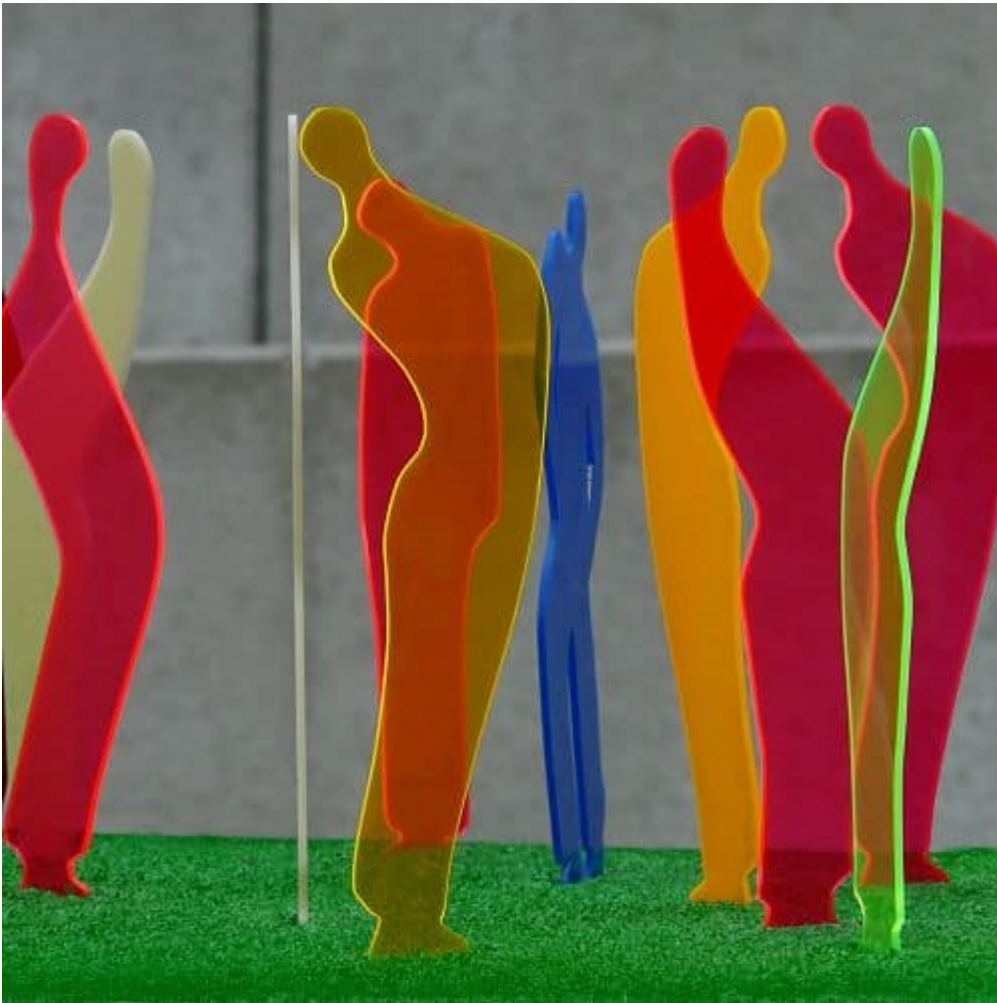
We saw it coming, but now it's obvious: art and visual methods are occupying increasing positions of relevance in our discipline. Since Allegra Lab is trying to be in tune with contemporary debates both within society and in anthropology more specifically, we prepared for you this list of exciting upcoming events. Do get in touch with Andrea at andreak@allegralaboratory.net if you want your event to be featured in our next monthly list…and send us your reports on events you organised. All this information is then stored in our calendar and shared on social media platforms. We look forward to hearing from you!

Workshop FABRIQ'AM: Beauty contests in the Native Americas: performance, glamour and cultural heritage

11 December 2015, Maison Ethnologie et Archéologie (University Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense), France

Alongside with community leaders, shamans or bilinguals teacher, beauty pageant winners are now one of the common characters that ethnographers meet in the course of fieldwork among Amerindian people. Yet, if beauty contests organized in non-indigenous American contexts have stimulated much attention (see for example King-O'Riain 2006; Ochoa 2014; Siu 2005; Stoeltje and al. 1996; Wateson and Martin 2004), anthropologists have shown little interest in Amerindian beauty pageants, despite a few exceptions (Canessa 2008; Jacobsen-Bia 2014; McAllister 1996; Moreno 2007; Rahier 2008; Rogers 1999; Schackt 2005; Wroblewski 2014).

Using Latin and North American examples, this workshop proposes to partially fill this gap by exploring the variety of ways in which Amerindian people organize their beauty contests. The convenors will focus in particular on understanding the connections between the competition and issues of ethnicity, the performance of identity and gender, and the objectification of tangible and intangible Amerindian culture. What is the relationship between indigenous beauty contests and processes of cultural revalorization? Whilst inspired by national beauty pageants, themselves modelled on the staging of Miss World and Miss Universe competitions, indigenous counterparts reveal, however, very singular logics and issues at times at odds with the standards of national Shows. [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 6 September 2015

International Workshop: [Contemporary Anthropologies of Art](#)
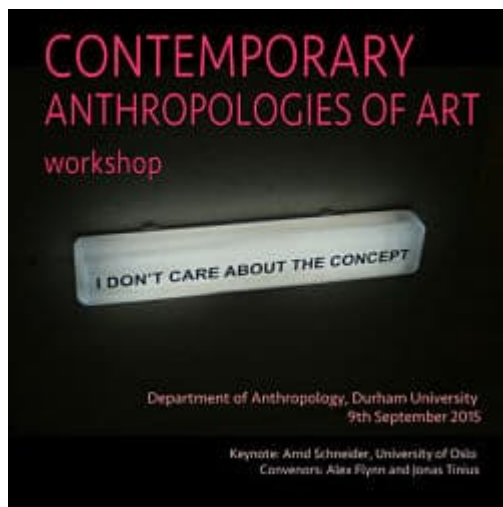
9 September 2015, Department of Anthropology, Durham University, UK

Keynote: Professor Arnd Schneider (University of Oslo)

Building on such established anthropological approaches to art as those of Alfred Gell or Pierre Bourdieu, this workshop seeks to map out contemporary anthropological approaches to art. Furthermore, by asking what distinct views on artistic practices are offered by such new theoretical perspectives as ethnographic conceptualism (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013) or relational aesthetics (Sansi 2014), we hope to propose new pathways of anthropological inquiry. A key proposition behind this workshop is the idea that contemporary art theory and practice are increasingly in dialogue with theories of sociality – how we relate to other people to create meaning – and therefore connected to core anthropological interests. The objective of this workshop is therefore not just to apply existing anthropological theory to potentially new ethnographic situations characterized by the production of art, but to develop anthropological theory through an engagement with the conceptual approaches that underpin the contemporary production of art today.

As an Anthropologies of Art [A/A] Network research event, the conference also seeks to map out a range of contemporary approaches to the study of art. Contributors from Oslo, Berlin, Moscow, Barcelona, and the UK will discuss case studies that impact on contemporary anthropological theory.

Please register with the convenors Alex Flynn (alex.flynn@durham.ac.uk) or Jonas Tinius (jlt46@cam.ac.uk)

Conference: [InterAsian Connections V: Seoul (2016)](#)

27 – 30 April 2016, Seoul National University Asia Center, Korea

The fifth conference in this international conference series showcases innovative research from across the social sciences and related disciplines and explores themes that transform conventional understandings of Asia. Crossing traditional area studies boundaries and creating international and interdisciplinary networks of scholars working to theorize the intersection of the "global" and the "regional" in a variety of contexts, the conference reconceptualizes Asia as a dynamic and interconnected historical, geographical, and cultural formation stretching from West Asia through Eurasia, South Asia and Southeast Asia to East Asia.

Following the model used in previous conferences, the 2016 Seoul conference – comprising ten concurrent, closed director-led workshops and plenary sessions open across workshops and to the general public – will be structured to enable intensive working group interactions on specific research themes as well as broader interactions on topics of shared interest and concern. [[more](#)]

Deadline for submission of workshop papers: 8 September 2015

Conference: Resistance – Lives of Dissent and Revolt

6 -7 November 2015, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, USA

The theme for this year's graduate conference will address the powers and limits of resistance. What constitutes resistance and how is resistance embodied? How do we think through our experiences of dissent and revolt? As recent decades have been shaped by struggles of resistance, this conference considers the various possibilities that resistance opens for our futures of revolt. The convenors welcome and strongly encourage submissions from all disciplines as well as individuals working beyond academia. Possible paper topics may include, but are not limited to:

LGBTQ political activism, prison abolition movements, feminist epistemic resistance, resisting state violence, revolt through protest and rioting, [more]

Deadline for submission of abstracts: 15 September 2015

Modulations: Series Two

[The Arts & Culture Unit](#) and [Resonance104.4fm](#) are delighted to announce the second call for proposals for their joint initiative, [Modulations: Broadcasting Research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences](#).

Modulations offers academic researchers the opportunity to communicate their research in a creative format to new and engaged audiences, through working with a dedicated expert team of expert communicators and producers. This initiative offers significant benefits for research institutions in terms of both research impact and the profile of their research cultures.

Modulations comprises three stages: training in broadcast media; co-production of a programme or a series of programmes on the researcher's subject; and broadcast of the researcher's programme on Resonance104.4fm. Following broadcast, the programme will be available as a podcast, for both researchers and their institutions and/or funding bodies to further disseminate. In addition, each programme will become part of the Resonance104.4fm archive, available online. [[more](#)]

Deadline for submission of proposals: 21 September 2015

In/visibility and Difference: A Visual Methods Workshop

3 – 4 December 2015, Berlin

The [TRANSFORmIG project](#) (Humboldt University Berlin) and [Bard College Berlin](#) are organizing a two-day workshop to bring together international researchers, activists, and artists tackling the notion of difference with visual and visualization methods. The aim of the workshop is to share research conducted with visual methodologies and to collectively develop new ideas and strategies on how visual methods can enhance our understanding of contemporary social worlds. In three thematic sessions we will discuss the latest methodological developments in social sciences, innovative visual and participatory research tools, and co-operation possibilities between academia, activism, and art. The keynote speaker, Professor Caroline Knowles of Goldsmiths College, will share her expertise on visual methodologies in social sciences and offer her comments on the methodological tools discussed during the workshop. [[more](#)]

Deadline for submission of applications: 30 September 2015

Crisis in focus

Dimitra Kofti
September, 2015

This week we are featuring a series of posts curated by [Dimitra Kofti](#) on a very timely theme: CRISES.

Etymologically deriving from the Greek infinitive *κρίνειν* (krinin), crisis originally meant to formulate an opinion, to decide and to judge. In medical terms, it came also to mean the sudden deterioration of the symptoms of a chronic disease, underlining that each crisis is positioned in longer historical processes and

chronic phenomena.

> *While transformation and change are inherent to societies, crises can be moments or periods of abrupt changes, decisions and ruptures. However, the prolongation of the phenomena of what might be called crisis tend to normalize its experience and may blur the boundaries between normality and crisis.*

As Koselleck (2006) has suggested through his study of the genealogy of the concept, one needs to historicize the crisis, as '*...it has been transformed to fit the uncertainties of whatever might be favored at a given moment*' (ibid:399). Recent studies have turned the attention to ways in which the concept of crisis has been deployed in diverse contexts (Roitman, 2014).

The recent turmoil provides the ground to challenge the current system of market economy. Crisis has been discussed and understood as a systemic ingredient of global capitalism (Harvey, 2010) as it has also generated various social movements of diverse political orientations. Some mobilizations have triggered new ideas about reciprocity, solidarity, social commitment, sacrifice and morality and opened up debates about the vitality of current hegemonic political regimes. However,

> *crises often result in temporalities of emergency, which provide the ground for rapid political decisions, based on given ideological assumptions that leave little space to challenge conventional ideas and to generate alternative ways to think about politics and the economy.*

Constructions of crises provide the grounds for legal interventions as well as for creating new targets of financial speculation, including the commodification of nature and the commons.

The recent economic turmoil, as developed in Southern Europe, has largely legitimized the implementation of austerity measures, the further demise of the welfare state and new practices of precarious work, based on a state of exception

and emergency (Athanasiou, 2012). Therefore, a crisis might not only provide the ground for a judgement based on critical thinking, but on critical decisions and directions, bringing to the fore particular issues while silencing others. As Alexandra Bakalaki's contribution *'Crisis, gender, time'* shows, although the feminization of poverty and gender inequality has deepened in crisis-ridden Greece, pointing out diversity is often seen as undermining peoples' solidarity against a more general 'human' crisis. She underlines that the more general category of the 'human' that struggles for survival becomes more important while talking about gender and other inequalities is often seen as not timely and are therefore neglected as subjects of discussion and intervention.

The crisis of capitalism calls for an attention on how shifts in political economies entangle with moral economies and vice versa. Jaime Palomera's contribution *'Did Main Street become Wall Street? The financialization of social reproduction'* points towards this direction. He suggests an anthropological reading of the Spanish housing crisis and indebtedness, by bringing together global financial institutions, state politics and the household. Similarly, Alice Elliot's contribution *'Crisis on the opposite shore'* looks at ways in which the economic crisis in Europe and the revolutionary upheavals in North Africa have shifted the geographies and the imaginations of 'Europe' and 'the West' as viewed by migrants and their families in North Africa. These new conditions have altered the migratory practices related to access to resources, while they have changed the spectrum of future possibilities. Both Palomera and Elliot conducted fieldwork before and during intense socio-economic shifts related to the recent economic crisis, providing comparative ethnographic material on the transformations occurred in peoples' livelihoods.

This collection of short articles addresses questions related to the concept of crisis in its socio-historical context, and/or focus on phenomena of the recent global economic crisis; it seeks to generate discussion on the ways in which crisis is discussed, constructed, theorized and hits the ground. Furthermore, it seeks to show the necessity of anthropological analysis in understanding current political and economic transformations.

This necessity triggers questions about the past and the possible future directions of the discipline. [James Carrier](#)'s contribution *'Asking Gramsci's question'* turns the attention to the crisis of the world economy in relation to a crisis in anthropology. Carrier draws parallels between dominant anthropological orientations of the last three decades and neoclassical economics, arguing that the centrality of the individual in the neoliberal ideology is also reflected in much of the anthropological analysis that has focused on the autonomy of the individual. Therefore, this thematic thread also seeks to open up an endoscopic discussion about the way anthropology may approach these recent phenomena of crises and how anthropological analysis has been affected by them.

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Investing without wealth: The

financialization of social reproduction

Jaime Palomera
September, 2015

A few years ago, even an expert on the risks of subprime lending would have been astounded by the very suggestion: a global crisis triggered by poor people defaulting on their mortgages? In fact, the logics behind the chain reaction that left capitalism teetering on the brink of collapse between 2007 and 2009 continue to raise questions today. The attempt to answer them has prompted a renewed interest in financialization, a notion that underscores the ascendancy of finance in capital accumulation. The concept covers many features, but the crisis revealed

its most prominent one: the extent to which the fates of global financial institutions and households have become intertwined. For low- and moderate-income populations, volatile financial markets have increasingly emerged as a means to securing their basic needs. For major banks across the world, capturing household revenue and trading it in international markets has become a vital profit strategy.

That finance capital builds on the indebtedness of ordinary people implies that it needs to permeate the structures of social reproduction.

Certainly, the CEO of an investment bank in the city of London does not know - even less care about- the lives and histories behind the securities he sells to various hedge funds. However, this does not change the fact that the financial products he works with are deeply embedded in very particular social relations and histories. Yes, financial markets have an inbred capacity for abstraction: they codify complex social relations into equities and bonds, attaching figures to them. But no technology can turn human needs and values into mere financial products, "melting all that is solid into air".

It is not by chance that Marx started his greatest work with the assertion that the market value of a commodity does not do away with its many other values.

Taking into account this elementary fact, it is striking that the actual people targeted by financial programs have remained relatively absent from the literature on financialization and its crises. Scholarly thinking has for the most part focused on policy, statistical data, and discourse. These perspectives are all crucial to understanding current patterns of accumulation, but they become problematic when households are presented as passive recipients that simply replicate the narratives of financial products and schemes.

Changes in the forms of accumulation are not merely imposed top-down: they are also produced through the relations that structure people's everyday life.

Such a gaping hole calls for an anthropology of actually existing financialization. By this I mean the study of the institutional transformations, social relations and dispositions that underlie the growing dominance of finance capital. Such an endeavor can only be accomplished through an exploration of all scales involved: from the state and financial markets to the household and its social milieus (the living sphere, the workplace). In short, the structures, practices and meanings which make the financialization of social reproduction possible. The remainder of the text builds on the arguments above and outlines four central dimensions of this approach, drawing from research on the bubble-and-bust as it unfolded in Spain.

1. Finance penetrates the household by mediating systems of private provision where public provision (for housing, pensions, health, education, etc.) is curtailed or dismantled. Substantial state intervention is necessary to create the conditions for capital accumulation in these spheres of social reproduction and their integration with financial markets.

Housing in particular plays a key role in the financialization of home: mortgage debt is the largest component of household indebtedness in the world.The significance that housing can acquire for financial accumulation is perhaps nowhere as clear as in Spain. Today, the vast majority of the population in that country (around 87 percent) own their home. To be more precise, what many people own is a mortgage that they will most likely be repaying for as long as they live. In 2007, at the peak of the boom, residential mortgage debt to GDP ratio reached the staggering figure of 62 percent. Yet a brief glance at history and... surprise: only 50 years ago most Spaniards lived in rented dwellings. How did this huge transformation come about?

The seeds of the shift were planted during late Francoism, in the 1960s. The technocrats of the regime had always envisaged industrial production as the engine that would modernize the national economy. But they soon realized that other sectors would need to be developed to compensate for the country's

competitive disadvantages vis-à-vis the advanced industrial economies of the European north. The solution came through what David Harvey calls the secondary circuit of accumulation, i.e. switching investment flows to the built environment. The dictatorship earnestly created the conditions for capital accumulation around real estate and construction, shaping both supply and demand. First, by giving birth to a powerful industry, capitalized by a series of developers that would later acquire an oligarchic position. Second, by promoting large-scale housing for sale to the working classes, under a system of public mortgages and price controls. This was one of the most singular legacies of the Francoist regime, honored until today by social-democratic and conservative governments alike: state-subsidized apartments that can be privately owned and eventually traded in the market at any price. The ultimate expression of this pattern of accumulation is the plethora of residential beehives that were built in the country's urban peripheries during the housing boom lasting until 1973.

Whereas French grands ensembles, US projects, or English new towns featured social rented units, most polígonos de viviendas in Spain were inhabited by petty owners, and prone to speculative strategies.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Spanish industries were severely restructured and capital accumulation increasingly specialized in the attraction of international financial flows through real estate and construction. In this context, the continued extension of mortgages to low- and moderate-income populations gained an even bigger significance. First, financial markets were highly deregulated, public banking abolished and private financial transactions given free reign. The foreign investment manias in Spanish real estate and financial markets of 1986-1991 and 1997-2007 could have never taken place without these shifts. Second, changes in the mortgage and securities markets allowed commercial banks to grant loans extending both their length and the maximum legal loan-to-value percentage, and to turn them into marketable securities. Since 1998 and throughout a decade, mortgage securitization boomed and became the means to finance a large portion of bank lending in the country. The reconstruction of mortgage and securities

markets allowed boosting land values by extending loans to the low-income strata of the working class, particularly the young generations and the immigrant, without necessarily raising their precarious wages. Finally, the absolute deregulation of the real estate market made it possible to build in virtually every single plot of land.

These vast regulatory transformations crystallized in the boom-and-bust of 1997-2008. Real estate assets experienced an unprecedented revaluation together with mortgage prices, which allowed financial institutions to appropriate an ever-higher portion of household savings. At the same time, private consumption took off: not due to nominal growth in employment rates and wages (which stagnated) but to the wealth effect generated by the revalorization of real estate assets in the hands of households (acting as collateral for growing levels of household debt).

2. The privatization and financialization of social reproduction are embedded in projects of class domination, historically shaped and permeated with contradictions.

When Francoism extended home ownership and loans to the working classes, it accomplished an old bourgeois dream. Since the early 19th century, the European ruling classes had been worried about the growth of urban-based proletariats, *les classes dangereuses* that inhabited the always-ungovernable slums. In many different countries, home ownership appeared as a way of tying the better-off fractions of the working class to the dominant social order: giving them a stake in society while maintaining the property and class privileges of the powerful. Mortgage payments were expected to instill in workers the discipline of thrift and calculation, which would allegedly inhibit the growth of collectivism (what some called "the barracks of socialism") while strengthening self-sufficiency and family life in the image of the dominant classes. The Spanish dictatorship took this ambition a step further, to encompass a wider social majority: in 1957, the Head of the Housing Department announced the government's aim build "a country of homeowners, not proletarians".

Francoist technocrats imagined a society of petty owners, with low levels of redistribution, where oligarchic interests would never be endangered.

Their program was infused with a paternalist spirit, informed by the social doctrine of the church: owning the home was described as "a moral condition for the family", the antidote to "the tragedy of communitarian life", and a disciplining tool: "man, when he doesn't have a home, takes over the street, becomes ill-tempered, subversive and violent".

However, projects of class domination tend to contain contradictory views. Whereas paternalist conservatism saw home ownership as a pre-condition for the intellectual and moral elevation of the masses, emerging laissez-faire notions sought to turn all individuals into capitalists. Such an ideological difference incarnated, after all, a fundamental contradiction inherent to the commodification of housing: the introduction of exchange value (a real estate asset tied to the fluctuations of the market) into the sphere of the "home" (linked to a household, with all sorts of moral and affective values attached to it). Take the publicity deployed in the late 1960s to advertise Ciutat Meridiana, the peripheral area in Barcelona where I lived and did research (2007-2010):

"Buy today, now that you can choose, and be assured to make a generous profit in the near future".

In their campaigns to the proletariat, developers and real estate companies underscored the idea of the home as a financial investment, prefiguring the popular capitalism that would become hegemonic in the decades to come.

Today, Ciutat Meridiana figures among the poorest neighborhoods in Barcelona, but at the same time boasts the highest percentage of homeownership and household debt. It epitomizes the central role that the purchase of an apartment has come to play in the reproductive strategies of the working classes. Gradually, the vast majority of citizens, including the poorest, have subscribed the logic of

the home as a source of thrift and an investment: a pool where household revenue can be stored and generate profit if land prices go up. During booming cycles, the revaluation of homes work as collateral for mortgages that can sustain the consumption of many other goods, such as furniture or cars. However, these loans have increasingly adopted a predatory nature, as they are linked to a series of mechanisms (such as extremely volatile interest rates) that allow financial institutions to expropriate from households up to two or three times the original price of the home.

3. *Financialization hinges on the structures of inequality that shape the household and its social milieus. Financial flows travel through these social relations, ultimately to the benefit of banks.*

The expansion of finance capital between 1997 and 2007 absorbed cast-off areas like Ciutat Meridiana into the field of real estate speculation. The boom in the housing market of the neighborhood implied a price increase proportional to other central and gentrifying areas of Barcelona. The key in this process was the extension of mortgages to the most precarious strata of the working classes. Impoverished migrants, in particular, were key as they prolonged the growth of the financial-real estate industry: both as low-paid workers in the construction sector and as consumers of mortgage loans. This new demand was channeled towards impoverished neighborhoods where the most affordable housing was concentrated. Thus, unknown and slightly stigmatized neighborhoods were introduced onto the maps of potential buyers. Between 2002 and 2007, Ciutat Meridiana saw the opening of 7 new real estate offices.

Some of the agents who focused on attracting and channeling these impoverished migrants to Ciutat Meridiana described themselves as 'specializing in immigration'.

The spectacular growth of this 'migrant demand' contributed to spectacularly boosting property values, which created a general feeling of opportunity for social mobility in a place like Ciutat Meridiana. Many old residents, second-generation

migrants, turned their apartment into what people routinely called a 'bridge-flat': a primary dwelling used as a financial guarantee, often prior to being actually sold, in order to get a mortgage and buy a new home of higher economic value. This allowed many of these old-timers to move to suburban locations often considered more attractive. In less than a decade, half of the neighborhood's population was replaced by a new wave of residents, mostly foreigners. Eventually, the general feeling of a 'gold rush' turned some homes into financial assets, almost devoid of use-value: their latent nature as an investment and a potential source of profit – so clearly expressed in the publicity of the 1960s – was now massively realized.

The point is that financialization, like any other form of capital accumulation, depends on the production of difference. There is no doubt that predatory lending hit across different strata of the Spanish working classes. However, the case in Ciutat Meridiana shows that this process was uneven, as it was predicated on a clear division between new immigrants with no assets and older Spanish residents with some asset (basically their revaluated homes). Generally, the vast majority of migrants accessed the housing and mortgage markets in a clearly disadvantaged position, during the period when prices were peaking. They were generally given mortgages of a clear predatory nature, characterized by extremely volatile interest rates. Yet they formed a demand that contributed to boosting prices in peripheral areas, which the better-off residents could capitalize on. Moreover, the new residents were substantially impoverished due to the type of mortgages they signed, which contributed to intensifying the socioeconomic polarization between them and long-term residents.

If inequality at the neighborhood scale was crucial for financialization, the same occurred with the household. The extension of mortgages to the poorest populations depended on the networks of relations that the new homeowners built around them, and their internal differences. Since household income was often below the price of mortgage, the vast majority of new homeowners chose to sublet rooms. This was possible due to the existence of a huge number of migrants who needed to find accommodation, usually undocumented, and who

were therefore legally unsuitable for a mortgage.

As a consequence, the more established migrants emerged both as homeowners and landlords with the capacity to provide shelter for the undocumented ones, who then became their tenants.

Thus, the homeownership and mortgage markets were embedded in the informal subletting market: a structure by which the payment of the legally regulated debt that homeowners contract with banks depends on the payment of the morally regulated debt that they create with their relatives, friends or flat mates.

4. *The narratives inherent to financial products and schemes (such as risk and commodification) are not merely replicated in the sphere of the household but entangled with other meanings and values.*

The extension of financialization across the social spectrum has led researchers to focus on the narratives produced by financial institutions and their performative effects on the lives of ordinary people. Some have decried that people with no capital are increasingly led to think like investors or capitalists, taking risks that were hitherto the province of professionals. Others have indicated that one of the purposes of neoliberalism is to intensify commodification in all realms of social life. These analyses reveal the ideological project behind financialization, and sometimes lead to the commonplace affirmation that ordinary citizens in Main Street think the same way people do in Wall Street. However, what complicates the equation is that no family has yet been found that projects itself as a mere financial firm. If anything, ethnographic research proves that people's practices are embedded in complex context-bound meanings.

First, financialization is highly dependent on the commodification of the living space. However, people tend to deal with abstract market logics through concrete interpersonal relations that are often framed by moral and affective values. In Ciutat Meridiana, payments among homeowners and tenants, eventually absorbed by credit institutions, were often seen in the sphere of household reproduction as

acts of higher or lower solidarity, integrated in a language of favors, and enmeshed with other forms of support. At the scale of the poor household, the structural inequalities generated by financial expropriation are often lived and experienced through the moral obligations and the constraints of constantly changing moral economies.

The home can thus be a moral container of structural class inequalities and a productive base for exploitative and rent-seeking activities.

Second, perceptions of risk are not structurally inherent to financialization, but contingent on market conjunctures. During the Spanish boom-and-bust, the vast majority of people I met, some of whom were repaying several mortgages, did not perceive themselves as risk-takers. To the contrary, real estate assets were seen as absolutely secure wealth deposits, and mortgages as sound pathways. In 2007, I was often treated as "dumb" for renting my apartment in Ciutat Meridiana and "throwing my money away" instead of getting a mortgage. In a context of incessant real estate revaluation, investing one's money in a home had been socially constructed as a rational option, devoid of any risk. It was only when the financial crisis began that some people (especially those that had been hard-hit) began speaking of the risks they had taken when they signed for a mortgage.

In other words, evaluations of risk or security are often attached to the basic good or service in question and not to the financial asset or liability that mediates it. This implies that there are many other meanings at play. In Spain, despite the financial domination entailed, poor people often endowed home ownership with very different qualities: a property that can be transmitted across generations, a safe place during old age to compensate for the lack of public nursing homes, etc. Sometimes people took a quasi-Lockean stance and linked ownership to the notion of "freedom", though with class connotations. I will never forget the story of a man whose father had escaped in 1970 from conditions of quasi-servitude in an Andalusian large estate to Ciutat Meridiana. According to the man, when his father bought their first apartment, he joyfully exclaimed: "My children: if you

want to take a dump in this home, you can do it wherever you like, cause here no *señorito* will come and tell me to keep my kids from bothering him. If you want to pee in the middle of the living room, go ahead and do it!"

Paradoxically, the home-as-property emerged as the only kingdom where the subaltern felt they could reign.
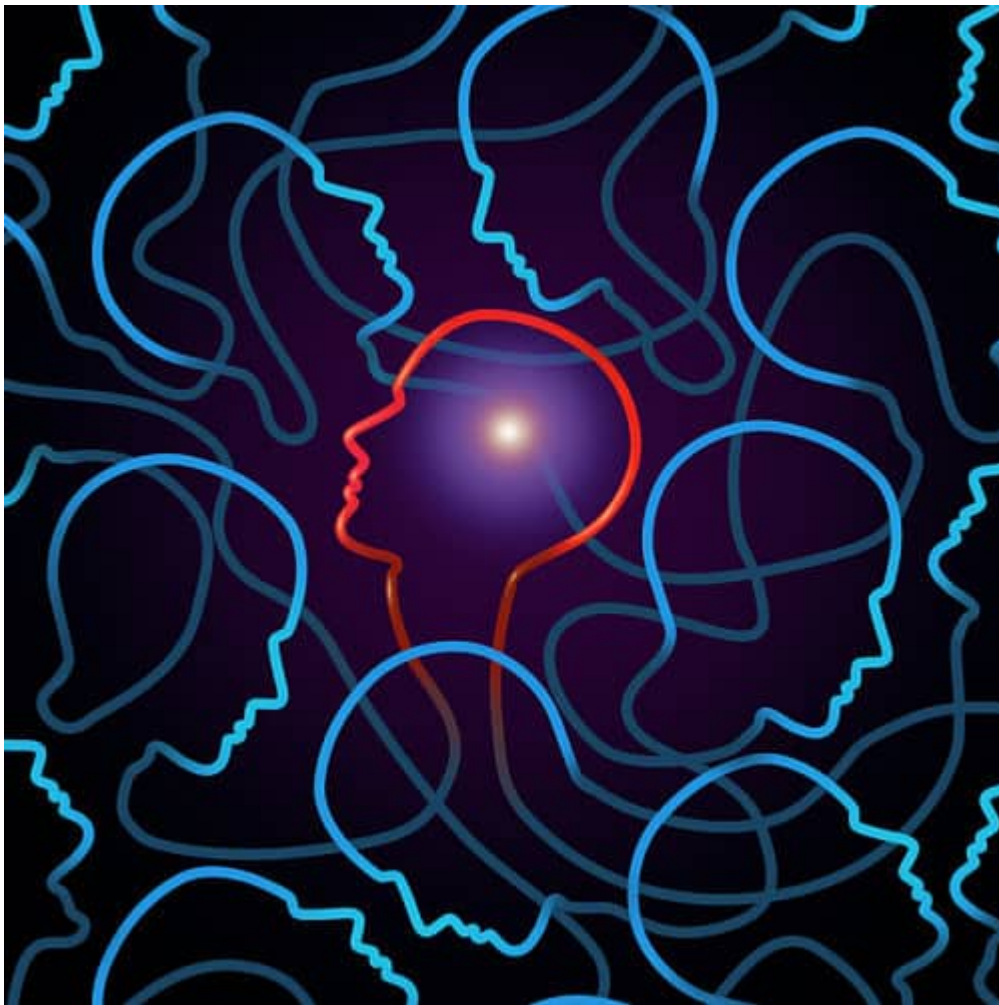
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Asking Gramsci's question crisis

James G. Carrier
September, 2015

Some object to the word 'crisis'. However, it is useful for describing the sense that what seemed to be an understandable present and a plausible future have become unpleasant, obscure and even unrecognisable. That sense is, a colleague suggested, what would have led to Gramsci's question: Everything seemed possible on the streets of Turin in 1920, so how did I end up in this Italian prison? In that sense, much of anthropology has been undergoing a crisis since the early years of this century, marked by things like books entitled *The end of anthropology?* (Jebens and Kohl 2011).

One common response to crisis is to promulgate a radical vision for a new future that rejects the past, the sort of thing that occurs among some anthropological advocates of ontology (Bessire and Bond 2014). It may, however, be better to look backward before envisaging a new future, to see how we got to the streets of

Turin and then to this prison. To do that, it is helpful to pause for a moment from our doing of anthropology and instead think about the discipline, or at least its most visible branches, in a broader context.

A noteworthy feature of that broader context is a different crisis. That is the economic crisis that began around 2008 and turned into the Great Recession. These crises are two faces of the same thing, the failure of what commonly is called neoliberalism, which I take to include the neoclassical economics that is its intellectual foundation.

In the closing decades of the twentieth century the orientation of neoliberalism pervaded more than government ministries and political debate. In addition, it pervaded the work of those who occupied the commanding heights in anthropology, though it did not do so under its own name. The crisis in anthropology and in the world economy are reflections of the shortcomings of that orientation. The shortcomings of concern here are those that led to the sense that anthropology had lost its way, that, as George Marcus (2008: 2) put it, the discipline is 'in suspension', with 'no new ideas and none on the horizon'.

Neoliberal anthropology

In the discipline of economics and in electoral politics the rise of neoliberalism meant the rejection of what had gone before. That had been a set of orientations and policies that used Keynesian macroeconomic models to describe and make sense of a country's economy, and to figure out what government could do to improve things. In economics in the 1970s Keynesian approaches were replaced by neoclassical ones, and in politics in the years around 1980 that orientation lost ground to the neoliberalism of Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US.

What replaced that old orientation was the assumption that autonomous

individuals are the best judge of their own interests, which they could best realise through transactions in a free market.

> *Microeconomics replaced macroeconomics; a focus on individuals and their desires replaced a focus on systems and their operations; government as the minimal guardian of free markets replaced government as the formulator and implementer of notions of the common good.*

These changes reflected more than currents of thought in university departments of economics and government ministries. In addition, they reflected social movements in Europe and North America, the home of the most influential anthropology at the time. Those movements objected to government policies and social practices that were seen to deny individual freedom – autonomy under a different name. The 1960s and 1970s saw the civil rights movement in the United States, the women's liberation movement and protest against the American war in Vietnam in many countries, and the events of May of '68 in France.

Anthropology was not immune to these movements, and many anthropologists took part in them. It should be expected, then, that intellectual orientations in the discipline began to change at around the same time, and in a similar direction.

One aspect of this was the Cultural Turn, which drew on the work of Clifford Geertz (esp. 1973) and which affected the social sciences generally. Geertz argued that we should focus solely on culture, on how people perceive and think about their lives, and that our job is to describe that culture, not to explain it. This meant that we should forego attention to those things that are outside of people's awareness, whether because they are distant from people's lives and hence invisible to them or because they are nearby but not, for whatever reason, objects of attention and cultural elaboration. Such a stance makes it more difficult to identify systems or structures, such as the system of the *kula* ring, invisible to individuals who participated in it, or the economic system that Keynesian macroeconomists investigated, invisible to individuals who bought and sold in their familiar shops and markets.

A different and more explicit challenge to the idea of system also was emerging around the time of the Cultural Turn, and it also affected the social sciences more generally. Sherry Ortner produced an influential summary of this criticism in the middle of the 1980s. She said that attention to system is not enough, that we need to pay more attention to people and their lives. As she (1984: 148) put it, the question we need to address is 'the relationship(s) that obtain between human action, on the one hand, and some global entity which we may call "the system," on the other'.

Ortner's criticisms were taken in various directions, but ultimately many anthropologists ended up ignoring her point that we need to address the relationship between systems or structures and human action. Instead, her point got turned into a rejection of structure, poststructuralism, as many in the discipline embraced what came to be called 'everyday life' and 'lived experience' and the perspective of those who experienced that life.

It seemed that Margaret Thatcher was right: There is no such thing as society.

Two of the arguments put forward to justify and encourage this change were especially influential and noteworthy. One was the assertion that societies and cultures contain so many divergent perspective and experiences, and that their boundaries are so porous and indeterminate, that we can not speak of them as ordered wholes. Rather, the best we can do is describe the complexity and fluidity that our research reveals. The second was the assertion that to think in terms of systems or structures means imposing a Western and Modern frame on a world to which it does not really apply.

As a result of these and other arguments, more and more anthropologists sought to describe the otherness, the difference from the Modern West, that they found in the field. As Patricia Spyer (2011: 62) put, anticipating the growing disciplinary interest in ontology, we must reject 'any attempt to domesticate such otherness by either explaining it away or reducing it to something already known and comprehensible.'

Thus it was that the critics of the old order kicked away one of the two legs on which, Radcliffe-Brown (1952) said long ago, the discipline stands. One of those legs is the description in anthropological terms of what the researcher sees in the field, which Radcliffe-Brown called 'ethnography'. The other is the development of reasonably valid generalisations about social life in a range of societies, what he called 'comparative sociology'. The critics rejected the comparative sociology and restricted themselves to the ethnography, and increasingly one that attended to the distinctive perspectives and experiences of smaller and smaller sets of people.

A growing number of influential anthropologists, then, saw their task as attending to, even celebrating, people's perspectives on the world, while refusing to attempt to explain those perspectives. In that, those anthropologists came to echo important aspects of neoliberalism and the neoclassical economics on which it draws.

The equations and graphs of neoclassical economics are intended only to summarise transactions in a market in a pure form, just as market price is taken to reflect the aggregate of those transactions in monetary terms. Neither the economists nor the price attempt to identify the reasons why people buy or decline to buy what they do, for they are focussed on the moment of transaction itself. Those reasons are assumed to reflect people's values, but they are treated as given, beyond the scope of the economic models and money prices. In this, they look a lot like anthropologists who observe people's cultures, their perspectives and orientations, but restrict themselves to recording them and do not try to account for them.

For the more thorough-going of those anthropologists, what people say and do is treated simply as an expression of what is unknowable but can only be inferred, their culture. In the same way, what people do in their market activities is treated as their 'revealed preference', which can be used to infer what is also unknowable, the inner state of mind that is their true preference.

And just as neoliberalism is a celebration of the free market, where people

transact in ways that express their preferences, so much of anthropology sees itself as a celebration of diversity, of people acting in ways that express their cultures.

Autonomy and anthropology

I have argued that, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, an important stream in anthropology, probably the dominant stream in American anthropology, followed an intellectual course that resembled the intellectual course of economics. In both, a concern with systems or structures was rejected as illegitimate. In both, attention turned instead to individuals, in the case of economics, and to ever smaller sets of people, in the case of anthropology. In both, the only legitimate public activity was encouraging people to express their orientations, by expanding the scope of the market in economics or by celebrating diversity in anthropology.

The individualism that these two disciplines embraced has been attractive to many, but it has had some unfortunate, unforeseen consequences.

For neoliberals and economists, it meant the encouragement of orientations and policies that led to the Great Recession. Doubtless those people intended no such thing, but the limitations of their perspective were such that their policies and arguments resulted in hardship for many people around the world.

Those anthropologists, and others, who embraced the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s saw individual autonomy as a way to correct the injustices of the old order. It may have corrected some of them. However, and however unintentionally, it presaged what looks like increased injustice, a growing repression of disadvantaged groups in many of the Western countries that were the home of those movements, a repression suggested by the rising proportion of the population that ended up in jail (Wacquant 2010). Finally, for anthropology

the growing interest in celebrating the diversity of cultures, coupled with an aversion to explaining any of them, runs the risk of turning the discipline into what Nicholas Thomas (1991: Chap. 4) described, cabinets of curiosity. They were popular among early English travellers to the Pacific, who used them to display the curious things that they had collected on their travels, things that they made no effort to understand.

For anthropologists who seek to understand the world that they confront, who want to know not simply what is there but why it takes the form that it does, this is not a pleasant place to be.

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Crisis on the opposite shore – Notes from the field on crisis, revolution, and the possible

Alice Elliot
September, 2015

This piece is a from-the-field reflection on the ways in which grand events and processes such as global financial crises and revolutionary upheavals come to intersect – often along surprising coordinates, temporalities, and scales – with people's imagination of the possible. I draw on my present research on concepts of *azma* (crisis) and *thawra* (revolution) in emigrant areas of North Africa where migration to Europe has for decades inflected, if not constituted, "the possible" in both material and existential terms. In this piece, I share some preliminary reflections on how local cosmologies of migration seem to be interacting in complex ways with major events/processes taking place both on the opposite shore and in the neighbouring Middle East. I draw, in particular, on ethnographic material from emigrant Morocco, and, noting some of the subtle changes in recent years in the ways people here refer to "Europe", "the West", or more generally "the outside" (*l-barra*), I begin to reflect on the multi-scalar and multi-

temporal "work" of crisis, revolution, and their aftermaths, on horizons of possibility.

Just country and crisis

"Italy is just country now" the girl sitting next to me on the bus rattling towards Casablanca comments bleakly. We boarded the bus together in one of the many towns of rural Central Morocco renowned since the late 1970s for its marked levels of emigration toward Southern Europe. My travel companion is on her way to the Italian Consulate in Casablanca to file her third, and – she is confident – finally successful visa application. Soon she'll be living in Italy, she tells me. Her older sister, her younger sister's husband, her paternal cousin, her maternal uncle, his two grandchildren..."*kullhoum f l-barra*", they are all "in the outside", she says. Up, down, and sideways: as often happens in this part of the world, "the outside" relentlessly criss-crosses the kinship diagram I try to picture in my head as she speaks of her family. But, today, it's her turn to leave: "*bssalama ciao ciao*" [goodbye goodbye] she whispers with a wide smile. She then looks out of the window, and sighs: "the truth is, though...Italy is just country now...country and crisis...that's all 'the outside' has become, my sister..."

My travel companion's words surprise me. I have heard many times before negative, sarcastic, disillusioned comments being made in this region of Morocco about Italy, Europe, and "the outside" in general. These comments, however, are generally made with the shared understanding that, despite all its flaws, irrational bureaucratic systems and racist police, "the outside" (*l-barra*) is anyway better than "here" (*hnaia*), and is always a place worth dedicating one's life to – and risking it for. In the emigrant region of Central Morocco where I have been conducting fieldwork since 2009, *l-barra* – literally "the outside" in Arabic, and the term used for "Europe",or "the West" – is the beating heart of a whole topography, and cosmology, of migration. *L-barra* powerfully permeates local life and future dreams, conversations and political debates, daydreams and

nightmares, wedding arrangements and religious consultations, romantic encounters and kinship relations (Elliot 2012).

The words spoken by the young woman sitting next me on the bus jar with the picture of "the outside" I have become accustomed to – a place of hope and possibility, of escape and wealth, of power and prestige. Referring to Italy as country (*'aroubia*), casts "the outside" in a very different light indeed. Though encompassing different meanings, and not all of them negative, the term *'aroubia* has very specific connotations in Morocco. *'Aroubia* holds deep connotations of backwardness, illiteracy, coarseness. *'Aroubi* (peasant, or "from the country") is generally used disparagingly, and immediately classifies someone as vulgar, ignorant, even animal-like. Interestingly, *'aroubia* is precisely the term used by the Moroccan urban middle/upper classes to refer to areas like rural emigrant Morocco and its inhabitants, often portrayed as uneducated, gullible, and desperate to reach Europe even by way of rickety overcrowded boats. By defining Italy as *'aroubia*, the young woman is knowingly turning such venomous images on their head. However what she is also doing, is positioning "the outside" not only in the realm of backwardness and hardship, but also in the realm of the vulgarly familiar, and of the depressingly unimpressive.

In the past few years, I have increasingly noticed a change in tone and language in the ways my Moroccan friends and acquaintances refer to "the outside", l-barra.

Particularly in those towns and villages of Central Morocco with exceptionally high levels of emigration toward Southern Europe, I have noticed an increasing sense of bafflement, disillusionment and scepticism toward the opposite shore and its tangible signs of deterioration. My interlocutors tend to explain such troubling developments in terms of *l-azma* – "the crisis" –, the expression used to refer to what has been formally labelled the 2007-2009 global financial crisis. In rural Central Morocco, *l-azma*/the crisis is everything but an event of the past,

and continues erupting with different force and scale in different areas of personal and relational life, particularly when it comes to households with emigrant family members – the absolute majority in the area (Elliot 2015).

Recently, an old acquaintance from an emigrant village of the area, showed me to her bedroom and pointed to two big suitcases on the floor, filled to the brim with food. "These are going to Italy tomorrow" she told me; "my son can't afford to eat over there". I have often witnessed families in this region sending food to their emigrant relatives living in Europe: mint rolled up in damp newspaper, homemade bread and biscuits, olive oil, sometimes even pieces of frozen sacrificial ram, dutifully preserved since the last Eid. Rarely, however, have I seen such basic staple foods as the ones I saw packed in this woman's suitcases: packs of pasta, bags of rice, onions. And rarely have I heard the sending of food to emigrant relatives living in "the outside" being termed as a question of necessity, and emergency, rather than as a question of comfort, a way of maintaining a faraway husband's, daughter's, or cousin's ties to home.

The woman told me that, every Thursday, a man from the neighbourhood leaves with his car packed full of food, and, for 250 dirhams (about £16), he drives the goods to his neighbours' relatives living in Italy. "Once we would pay him to carry over clothes and washing machines from the outside…now we pay to send food to the outside", the woman muttered to me. "I'm telling you, the whole world is turning upside-down," she concluded grimly.

It is with increasing frequency that I hear such comments in the emigrant rural areas of Central Morocco where I conduct fieldwork. People comment on how the world is behaving in unpredictable, "upside-down" ways – and, in particular, on the fact that relationships between "here" and the opposite shore are gradually turning wild. News circulates in the area about fit young men losing their jobs on construction sites in Italy, about water being cut off in flats in southern Spain where Moroccan relatives have lived for decades, about money being sent to

husbands in France to pay electricity bills, about phone-calls asking for help being received from, rather than made to, "the outside".

L-azma/the crisis here thus takes more than mere economic connotations. People's experience of the crisis is often voiced and explained in economic terms, mainly with reference to the increasing economic difficulty encountered by relatives and acquaintances living in "the outside". But as emerges from the ethnographic snippets above, the expression *l-azma*/the crisis references also a more subtle analysis taking place in the area of the current (existential as much as financial) state of the world. It refers to a deeper sense of troubling transformation, to a sense that something fundamentally wrong, strange, and rather bleak is taking place on the other side of the sea.

> *Indeed, my sense is that l-azma/the crisis is subtly permeating not only people's remittances and economic possibilities, but also people's very imagination of "Europe" and "the outside", and the horizons of possibility these have for decades constituted and sustained.*

Other horizons

The shifting horizons of possibility in emigrant Morocco – and North Africa more generally – are not of course affected solely by *l-azma*/the crisis taking pace on the opposite shore. Other equally "grand events" have recently erupted in the region, and are also interacting in complex, often unpredictable, ways with people's imagination of the possible. First among these are the revolutionary upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa – or, the "Arab Spring" for short. Crucially, for many living in emigrant areas of Morocco, economic crisis and political revolutions overlapped, both temporally and experientially. When I spoke with Moroccan friends at the height of the revolutionary events in North Africa in early 2011, they were gazing over the sea with angst toward a Europe showing

increasing signs of crisis, and concomitantly gazing to the East with thrilled, and stunned, curiosity. Confronted with such a peculiar historical conjuncture, we may wonder what exactly happens to the imagination of the possible, when a place that has become a synonym for possibility, wealth and dignity shows signs of deterioration, and a place that is associated with hardship, corruption and impossibility shows signs of transformation.

Given the current situation in many of the countries touched by the 2010-2012 wave of revolutionary unrest, such a question may sound a tad anachronistic. However, just as the 2007-2009 global financial crisis is very much the stuff of the present for people in emigrant Morocco, so would it be mistaken to define the "Arab revolutions" as the ineffectual, and settled, stuff of the past. Indeed, not only are *l-thawrat* (the revolutions) still discussed in rural emigrant Morocco as recent, close, and unpredictably "alive" events, but, also, the debris of nearby revolutionary explosions are still very much present in people's discussions and practices (Stoler 2008) – suggesting that *l-thawrat*/the revolutions, just as *l-azma*/the crisis, may also be inflecting local imaginations of the possible.

I came to realise this relatively recently, when I visited an old acquaintance in a village of the Moroccan Middle Atlas, a Berber woman in her early seventies. "Did you see us on TV?" she asked me once we had exchanged news on the health of respective relatives. "We can do things too, if we really want to", she smiled at me. She was making reference to *l-thawrat*/the revolutions: we hadn't met since their outset at the end of 2010. Her question surprised me at first, and not only for the time-lag between the events she was referring to and our conversation.

Never before had I heard her referring to the rest of the Middle East, or North Africa, let alone to the rest of Morocco, as "us". Most importantly, maybe, never before had I heard her contemplating the possibility that that it would be l-barra/the outside watching, rather than the other way round.

As is the case also in the bus conversation I recount above, it seems as if both *l-azma*/the crisis and *l-thawrat*/the revolutions afford a curious change of perspective, where whom is observing, and the quality of what is being observed, can suddenly switch, even if sometimes only fleetingly so.

I have encountered such changes of perspectives, and plasticity of horizons, at different scales, and in different spheres, of daily life in emigrant Morocco. For example, while having the conversation above with my elderly host, the woman's son Mustafa, hearing us mention *l-thawrat*/the revolutions, joined in the conversation. He told me that just recently there had been a peaceful revolt in the village market, which resulted in small vendors like himself finally obtaining the right to move their (unlicensed) stalls from the tiny backstreets to the main square, where most of the bigger, more established stalls, stand on market day. Mustafa explained to me that the move had finally succeeded because "*ykhafu*" (they are frightened). The police, the local officials, and other local emissaries of the central government ever-present in Moroccan rural life, are showing an interest in the news too, Mustafa explained to me. "And now they know what can happen", he added, pointing his thumb to the right, to the East of his country. Interestingly, and crucially I think, at no point in his story did Mustafa refer to the possibility of a *Moroccan* revolution, nor did he (or his mother for that matter) express any particular desire for it. However, the nearby *thawrat*/revolutions – together with their complex, multi-directional, aftermaths – unexpectedly emerged at the horizons of his actions in the narration, and suddenly seemed to contribute in fundamental ways to what Mustafa considered possible to do and think in the immediacy of his life.

The possible

It is ethnographic moments such as these that suggest to me that grand events such as "crisis" and "revolution" – and their uneven overlaps – are complexly interacting with the ways possibility (past, present, future) is imagined in North Africa. Major historic moments may not – particularly when somehow removed as is the case for Morocco – have immediate, ethnographically palpable, effects – especially if these effects are merely searched for, say, in statistical changes in transnational movement. These grand events, however, when approached as complex ethnographic concepts rather than simple transcendent "facts" (Roitman 2014), may be found to be operating in people's lives in more subtle, and deeper, ways – penetrating, for example, those very horizons of possibility within which lives, actions, and thoughts unfold. My sense is that, in emigrant areas of Morocco, "Europe", as a native concept, is being deeply affected by the conjuncture of "the outside" in crisis and "the inside" in upheaval. The subtle changes this peculiar historical conjuncture is producing in the imagination of the possible reveals how hope and bleakness are conditions ever latent on both shores.

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Crisis, Gender, Time

Alexandra Bakalaki
September, 2015

Economic crises are especially hard on women (Bettio et al. 2013, Manganara 2014, Seguino 2009, UNICRI 2014, Walby 2009) and the Greek crisis is no exception (Athanasiou 2011, Avdela 2011, Kambouri 2013, Karamessini 2014, Lyberaki and Tinios. N.d., Vaiou 2014a, 2014b). The effects of lay-offs, wage and pension reductions and the collapse of social services are felt by practically everyone, but women have less to lose and they are losing it faster. Especially vulnerable are those under twenty five and over sixty five, single mothers and immigrants. With or without paid jobs, women are expected to care for small children that have to stay home due to the closing down of state nurseries, they have to look after older and sick family members who no longer have access to social services, and they have to exercise their homemaking skills so as to make

the best of household resources. Being employed while married to a jobless husband often produces a sense of guilt, which women cope with by intensifying their commitment to housework and family care (Georgiadou 2014). Violence against women at home is on the rise (Davaki 2013:10, Svarna 2014). According to a recent study, prostitution has increased dramatically since the onset of the crisis and this is largely due to the fact that growing numbers of women turn to sex work in order to support themselves and their children (BHMAgazino 2015).

However, the gendered aspects of the "Greek crisis" draw little public attention and this can only exacerbate work and income inequalities between women and men (Federicci 2008).

In this short essay I try to situate this silence in the context of shifts concerning the meaning of gender and emergent conceptualizations of the relations between the present and the past. I also examine concerns over whether attending to gender and other differences undermines the solidarity bonds among those struggling against the crisis and more generally against capitalism.

Greeks often compare the current crisis to past periods of poverty, violence, political oppression and national humiliation and especially to the country's German occupation during World War II (Knight 2013, 2015). While the idea that the crisis constitutes a regression or setback ("pisogýrisma") seems self-evidently convincing, analogies between the present as the future of past hardship and the future that this present will bring are hard to draw. School children still learn that the history of Greece consists of a long chain of ordeals from which the nation has always emerged victorious; however, *this* ordeal seems unprecedented. Like elsewhere, modernization in Greece has been conceptualized as a function of time going forward and, until recently, for most people, living in the present meant working toward a future that would be better than the past. Nowadays living in the present has come to mean coping with insecurity. The anomaly to which the current "pisogýrisma" amounts is often described as entailing a "feminization" of

labor (Avdela 2011:14) and a sexual assault – "we are being / have been screwed" ("mas gamáne / éhoungamísei") – more specifically, as an act of sodomy (Knight 2015) robbing Greek breadwinners of their manhood and shaming them into pleading for dignity (Lyberaki and Tinios n.d). It follows that the plights of women are less worthy of concern.

According to Efi Avdela (2011:15) "the current financial crisis constitutes a setback as to the way in which gender is conceptualized and politically deployed. This is largely due to the fact that the crisis tends to naturalize gender and to render it invisible".

Similarly, Athena Athanasiou (2012: 28-39) suggests that the state of exception to which the crisis is often said to amount is hardly exceptional insofar as the crisis serves as opportunity for the renewal of the national imagined community's longstanding commitment to heterosexism and racism. The suggestion that the crisis entails a naturalization of gender implies that before the onset of the crisis the natural connotations of womanhood and manhood were less pronounced. The extent to which this is actually the case is difficult to assess as mainstream gender practices and conceptualizations in Greece remain understudied. Perhaps the idea that, before the onset of the crisis, the natural connotations of gender were steadily diminishing is retrospective modernist wishful thinking. As Kath Weston (2002: 94) observes, gender has constituted a "bastion of modernity" wherein beliefs in progress were reproduced.

According to Henrietta Moore (1999: 151) the only time we knew what sex and gender stood for was in the 1970s, when the realm of society and culture were assumed to be mutually exclusive. But "nature" and "sex" have turned fragile and "society", "culture" and "gender" seem less malleable than they were supposed to be. Thanks to developments in plastic surgery and biotechnology and the increased availability of all kinds of consumer products and services promising to enable people to become the bodies of their dreams, changing one's sexed body according to choice started to seem a more attractive option than waiting for

gender stereotypes to change (Moore 1999, Weston 2002: 132). As Marilyn Strathern (1992 : 141-142) suggests, by the late twentieth century counting as a person had become dependent on one's ability to exercise choice.

Looking back at my years of teaching in the Greek University since 1988, I realize that as time moved on, the students' assumption that the concept of gender referred to matters of individual choice, became harder to dislodge. Heather Paxson (2004) has suggested that after the second world war Greek urban middle class women shifted from defining motherhood in terms of an ethic of sacrifice toward defining it in terms of an ethic of choice and exercise of reproductive rights and eventually an ethic of well being and self-care. With motherhood becoming optional, opting for motherhood came to index a woman's capacity to make choices, and hence, an index of her modernity.

Six days before the national elections of January 25, 2015, Georgia Panopoulou, a deputy candidate running with the centrist *Potami* party said that the high rate of unemployment among women is not due to a shortage of jobs, but to the fact that, with social services collapsing, many women choose to stay home, to raise their children. Clearly, this is an example of neoliberal thinking. However, perhaps partly due to the influence of television commercials, describing one's actions as the outcome of choice has become quite common in spoken Greek. For example, saying "I chose to stay home" ("epélexa na míno spíti") instead of "I stayed home" ("émeina spíti") does not necessarily mean that one consciously identifies with neoliberalism or even knows what the term means. Rather, I think that it suggests that if anything is naturalized, it is the conceptualization of action (or even of lack thereof) as the outcome of conscious decision that weights costs and benefits (see Papagaroufali 2013). As one student put it in writing, "gender matters are by definition matters of personal choice. The problem is that in many underdeveloped countries women are coerced into dressing in certain ways or marrying men they are not in love with". It follows that anything short of "coercion" counts as "personal choice".

But as the crisis deepened due to repeated austerity measures, people started

talking more about actual and prospective losses rather than choices. It is as if much of what we thought we were or wanted to be has been erased by a new mode of existence described in terms of lack and loss – of income, job prospects, security, health benefits, the list is long. This state of deprivation is often glossed as regression to a distant "barbarous" past that is juxtaposed to the period preceding the onset of the crisis, which, at least by hindsight, seems marked by unprecedented affluence. While knowledge that this era has decidedly ended is painful, the recent past is also criticized as excessively individualistic, hedonistic, materialist and consumerist; perhaps there was too much choice. Although the majority of Greeks reject the scenario of the financial crisis as punishment for individual and collective indulgence, I think many feel that yes, to a certain extent, "we were carried away" ("eíhame xefýgei"), people were over-borrowing and overspending.

In Greece, like elsewhere, the tendency for excessive spending and the taste for luxuries is stereotyped as feminine (Vlahoutsikou 2000); hence, the implicit blame this attitude entails seems to be directed mainly against women.

However, the present regression to "underdevelopment" also provides the background against which a "structural nostalgia" (Herzfeld 1997: 22) for a putative pre-modern past becomes intensified. This past is marked by strong bonds within and between sustainable households and communities and by a hierarchy of values in which authentic, homemade goods and pleasures count more than things money can buy. This past is often described as a time of more hardship, but also more solidarity and humaneness (anthropiá). From this perspective, the value of solidarity and altruism lies in their potential deployment as antidotes to egoism (Graeber 2007). So far at least, in the context of the solidarity movement solidarity is conceptualized as an empowering bond that may potentially unite all those who experience the crisis as an "inhuman condition" ("apánthropi katástasi") regardless of gender or other differences (e.g. Rakopoulos 2014).

If what unites crisis-ridden Greeks, but ultimately all oppressed people in solidarity is their universal survival needs and basic human rights, attention to differences among the oppressed might be divisive. In Greece, when one brings the gendered aspects of the crisis up, one is likely to hear something like, "we are talking about something that threatens *everybody*", "this is no time to divide people into women and men". Like the "unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism" of which Heidi Hartmann (1981) wrote many years ago, the relationship between feminist and solidarity politics is fraught and perhaps for similar reasons. But gender is not the only kind of difference that seems to endanger solidarity. On the back cover of renowned sociologist Constantinos Tsoukalas's (2010) *The Invention of Alterity,* one reads: "The fact that 'the right to difference' seems to be disassociated from social justice and the right to [...] survival is no accident. As long as the idealization of free choice remains out of touch with the materiality of the survival needs of each and every victim of injustice, the dream of a better world remains incomplete" (my translation).

Cast as invented difference, gender is something that comes after, a bunch of attributes added on to a primary human defined by "survival needs". It is true that the SYRIZA government, of which Tsoukalas is a deputy, is LGBT friendly. However, the policies into which this friendliness translates are conceptualized as extensions of basic human rights to those that have been deprived of them rather than as celebrations of difference. But, perhaps nowhere is the emphasis on the common "survival needs" as strong and clear – but also as self-evident – as in claims for immigrant, refugee and asylum seeker rights. Clearly, cultural, linguistic or religious differences become trivial when set against the shared experience of life threatening precarity and exposure to racist aggression (Papataxiarchis 2014). But perhaps, the dilemma makes sense only insofar as "basic needs" may be abstracted from the lives and actions they are supposed to motivate. Likewise, the idea that bringing up gender inequalities endangers the prospects of solidarity makes sense as long as one can imagine the subjects of solidarity as generic humans – same and equal mortals in front of death (Argyrou 2002: 108-109, Bakalaki 2006: 401).

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Dis-orientalizing & Ethnographic Journeys

Priya Swamy
September, 2015

I conduct fieldwork among young Hindus in Amsterdam, the city where I have lived for nearly six years. Amsterdam lends itself to compartmentalisation as it is neatly divided up by canals; the boundaries between distinct places and streets seem to be part of the city's heritage. However, as I have became more engrossed in my fieldwork and reflexive in my approaches, the boundaries that I imagined between my city and my field have became blurry.

What appears on paper as a study of Hindu temples is in fact a project built on a

complex intersection of clothing stores, trendy cafes, bars, parks, living rooms and metro cars where the bulk of my ethnographic interviewing has taken place. Many of these places are those in which I socialize with friends and family. In this post I elaborate what this all means for my fieldwork.

I. THE CITY

One warm July evening, I agreed to meet a young female respondent named Jaya [2] in the centre of town to go shopping. We were looking for a bathing suits that she could buy for her upcoming summer vacation. After the third or fourth time that I glanced at my phone distractedly, my respondent asked me, '*do you need to leave or something?*' I apologised and said no, feigning interest in the row of sundresses behind her.

I was distracted by the fact that my husband had texted me to say he was sitting around the corner on a terrace with a group of friends, and inviting us to join them for a drink. Although Jaya and I often have our conversations on terraces or at restaurants and have made plans for our husbands to meet, I deliberately lead her to a café in the other direction. I tell myself that I am acting out of professionalism rather than anything else – that this was an interview and I needed to maintain certain boundaries. We continue our discussion in a more conventional manner: me with a tape recorder and she responding politely to my inquiries.

This was s major 'dis-orientalising' (Gunn 2009, 42) moment of my fieldwork. As Gunn notes in her study of a Hindu community in Ottawa, when she observed a middle class Hindu woman talk about worshipping the banana plant on Thursday, she felt odd and out of place. Surely, this was something that would make sense in a small Tamil village, but not in the city where she lived (2009, 41). Similarly, my panic in having my social life and fieldwork life collide on closer inspection had little to do with professionalism, but more to do with the idea of the city as a

compartmentalization of my fieldwork life and social life. Although I pretended to have interest in bridging the two, the idea frightened me as somehow inauthentic.

Unwittingly, I was perpetuating the idea of fieldwork as a journey to unfamiliar places. The possibility of doing fieldwork somewhere familiar, as someone other than a researcher (friend, wife or social animal), was somehow taboo.

I had already seen that people (ironically, mostly those who had never engaged in fieldwork themselves) took my choice to stay in the city where I lived as an easy way out of tropic diseases, isolated villages, mud huts and savage natives that somehow authenticated fieldwork praxis. I was already losing points as a researcher. On the other hand, I was well versed with reflexive and multi-sited field methods that complicated these sorts of static and romantic visions of 'the field'. Fieldwork was my everyday life. It was not an extended stay, day and night, into the world of a group of people (MacClancy 2002, 4) but an extension of my self in my city.

It was also clear that my respondents would not take my orientalising view of the city as the field very seriously. Although I began by trying to arrange meetings in temple spaces, my young respondents were more enthusiastic to take me to new restaurants and bars in popular parts of the city. I picked my respondents up from work and walked them home at night. I took them to places in the city they had never been, and they showed me parts of the town I had ignored. We guided each other through our city, and at times it was not clear who was leading whom.

II. Dis-Orientalizing

Besides working towards disorientalising Amsterdam as a field site, much work needed to be done in order to dis-orientalise my attitude towards Hindus in the Netherlands. The fieldworker occupies of course always a liminal position, being neither truly inside nor outside a community with which she work. Rather she is

constantly embedded and situated, speaking never from a neutral zone of 'see-all', but from within her own biases and experiences.

As a diasporic Indian, born in England and raised in Canada, my interpretative lens is necessarily a splintered one, refracted between middle class urban Indianness, political and social unrest in 1980s England, and idyllic small-town life in a self-described multicultural society that encouraged the novel and colourful display of difference.

My young respondents in the Netherlands are no less splintered: their lives as Hindus in the Netherlands are shaped by ancestral migration to Suriname from Calcutta, where, as one woman told me, 'Our ancestors took with them [religious] devotion and that was it. Now look at us, we build temples, we're educated'.

India has not been forgotten: if anything, its presence in collective memory has become more important across the second and third generation of Surinamese Hindus. India is seen as the land of temples, gods, wisdom and culture.

Some of my respondents travel to India, impressed by its city-sized temple complexes, public displays of Hinduism and urban landscape dotted with newer, renovated temples. At the same time, they are shocked and mildly embarrassed by the young ladies in Mumbai who drink alcohol and eat red meat.

Flashes of my own family and upbringing burst out when I document these comments of shock and embarrassment: a plate of steak and chips as a regular weekday meal, trips to rooftop cocktail bars and gentleman's clubs with relatives in Bangalore. I observe feelings of guilt among my respondents who find it difficult to abstain from chicken and eggs. In one of my more candid moments, I told a respondent and close friend that I grew up eating meat. She leaned in closer and lowered her voice. After listening to my failed attempt to explain what 'cow' tastes like, she uttered: 'your mom must be very modern to be cooking beef'.

I reflected briefly on this: I recalled the young Hindu girls I grew up with in Canada, happily eating whatever we wanted, my sister and I protesting to my mother that not eating meat before going to a temple was a silly idea: couldn't God see everything – including the package of minced meat and sliced ham sitting in our fridge? Most of all, I remember my mother giggling and giving in to such protests, as if they really had very little to do with our religion or culture.

But who am I to articulate these reflections? I am not conducting these interviews to compare notes as a member of a Hindu diaspora, I am there as a researcher!

Reflexive and feminist ethnographic practices have long ago disposed of the myth of the 'all-seeing' ethnographer, as [Henry](#) (2003, 231) points out. As a woman myself who associates with a diasporic Hindu identity, no matter how it is fragmented, this identity is neccesarily a part of my discussions as a research, not the least because I am talking to another woman who also associates with a conflicting, yet equally authentic diasporic Hindu identity.

For both of us, this conversation about eating beef was a disorientalising moment. Both my respondent and I were on edge. We both walked away puzzled with what to do with the information we had revealed to each other. What was I supposed to do with the accusation of being 'modern', or less Hindu? What was she supposed to do with her image of me as a Southern Indian student of Hinduism who grew up on a diet of meat?

Thinking of this encounter as a researcher, this moment of disorientalisation happened when I allowed myself to 'read back' my data through the lens of a Hindu diasporic woman, simultaneously letting my obsession with 'researcher identity' slip away.

It revealed to me that I was treating my Surinamese Hindu respondents as people obsessed with tradition, as those 'other' Hindus, the kind that I distanced myself from during 'multicultural day' at school: those who were

unafrid to perform their Hindu identity to their peers, who were even proud to do so by boasting of their special dietary restrictions and choreographing traditional 'Indian' dances.

At the same time, with the global spread of right-wing Hindu agendas that militantly uphold vegetarianism and 'cow protection' in public displays of diasporic Hinduism [3], I was belittling and rationalising my respondents' deep emotional involvement in this disciplining of eating habits as 'yet another' instance of Hindu fundamentalism.

What I eventually learned was to appreciate how my respondents' experiences as Hindus reveal complex journeys into discovery and self-fashioning that often break with ancestral norms. My respondents do not accept what they are told: they actively negotiate their identity through mediatised images of piety, love, and mythology, through self-taught philosophy and history. Jointly all this results in a highly personal engagement with the idea of what it is to be a Hindu. This work is emotional and intellectual, and it cannot be reduced to any one ideology or practice.

This post is a part of Allegra's Summer 2015 Fieldnotes series. See earlier installments [here](). Check out Priya's earlier post [here]().

Footnotes

[1] I would like to thank Dana van Breukelen, ethnographer and friend who first discussed with me the trials and frustration of doing fieldwork in one's own city. She also helped me sharpen my own ideas about Hindu identity.

[2] All names have been changed.

[3] See Warrier 2009.

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Buses in South and North Tehran: Education and Schooling

Amina Tawasil
September, 2015

The bus I was riding on my way to Tajrish (north Tehran) was beyond maximum capacity with its passengers. We were cramped and people stood and sat in areas they were not allowed to- between seats, corners, next to the automatic door, the area meant for the passengers' leg room, the areas where the tires are located underneath. The air conditioner was not turned on. Naturally, we all began sweating.

The women near me in the women's section, including those who did not wear the chador (large black cloth), fanned themselves with loose notebook paper, handkerchiefs, or newspapers. I had difficulty tolerating the heat because I was sitting further back near the engine. The other women near me loosened their shol (wrap around scarf) to let some air reach their necks. I followed suit. The bus driver decided to drive slow all of sudden. The women around me began complaining to each other, some raising their voices. By the time we passed

Hemmat, a man complained loudly about how uncomfortable we all were. Irked by this, the bus driver shouted in response. Another man became angry. The driver drove even slower.

> *"Ey, baba!!" everyone said in unison. The bus driver pulled to the side.*
> *"Boro! Birun!! Boro! Boro!!" (You [all] get out!!! Go! Go!) He shouted.*
> *"Naa, baba! Tsk. Tsk." They said in unison.*

Of course, no one disembarked. The bus driver eventually merged onto the street after shouting his last words to the man who complained. The women around me smirked and shook their heads. Some laughed. As we approached Tajrish, the man who had been angered was standing next to the bus driver. The two were getting acquainted with each other, both smiling.

The Bus Driver And His Passengers

A type of education, a transmission between individuals of 'how to do the right thing at the right time', had already taken place before this bus ride from south to north Tehran. The nuances of this interaction had been learned elsewhere, not exclusive to the space of schools or universities. The process is less noticeable (De Certeau 1984) to the untrained eye perhaps because the effort to transmit or passing on knowledge (ways of being) in public spaces like buses, street corners (Bayat 2010), parks, homes, cafes, the bazar (Keshavarzian 2007), guild meetings (Erami 2011), machine shops, or tailor shops (Lave and Wenger 1991), is less organized or permanent, and maybe assumed of lesser value, than in schools or universities.

In this bus ride, we can see that somehow the passengers understood that they could sit or stand even in places where they were not allowed. Women, including myself, knew how far back to draw their scarves over their heads without causing a stir. The passengers likewise knew that this experience would conclude with

relative ease, and it was not necessary to step off the bus as the driver commanded. They knew the bus driver did not literally mean what he said, even as angry as he was. 'Get off the bus!' stood for something else taking place, unnamed, but understood by most everyone inside the bus. The driver, too, was uncomfortable with the heat, perhaps with his responsibilities towards his passengers. But, to openly 'complain' or admit so to his passengers would be unacceptable on all registers he identified with – manager, man, and masculine. The ideal response to discomfort beyond his control would be to endure. By driving slow, he was able to bring the passengers to protest with him against the horrible conditions inside the bus, which he was responsible for, but he could not control.

This moment, I think, exemplifies an ongoing how to think with others, a moment of 'critical thought' between everyone inside the bus where circumstances and ideals are unable to fully dictate or determine human behavior and interaction.

My analysis reflects Lawrence Cremin's expansive definition of education

"…as the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, or sensibilities, and any learning that results from the effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended" (Cremin 1978: 567).

These take place beyond schools and universities. By assuming this definition, which essentially differentiates education from schooling, I am able to show that the processes of "critical thought" take place everywhere. This is important to lay out.

Thinking Together From Tajrish

Tajrish is a section of north Tehran Iranians considered liberal, modern and secular. The area is home to a handful of embassies, but also where expats lived. Clothes, food, and household items sold in Tajrish are imported and sold at prices most Iranians cannot afford. The streets are lined with mansions new and old, and men were known for driving expensive top-of-the-line European cars. There is a distinct social urge in Tajrish to dress in ways that challenge the Islamic regime. Instead of wearing the full veil, women wear the hijab to the bare minimum – tight fitting clothes and thick make-up. It is one of the few places in Tehran where women were not always reprimanded for smoking cigarettes in public areas like cafes and parks.

The feeling of ease at the end of the bus ride stood in contrast to the spirit of frustration among my friends in north Tehran when I arrived in Tajrish. Many of my friends in north Tehran drove their own cars, rarely took public transportation, much else visit a part of south Tehran where I lived. Many Iranians would consider them, as they considered themselves, well educated. Some of them were engineers, dentists, architects, and artists, while some worked in their family businesses or owned a business. They saw themselves as worldly, having traveled to North America, Europe or Southeast Asia, and marked themselves in ways identifiable as educated or "cultured". For example, they dressed in European-imported attire, sat with upright posture, spoke Persian with a distinct Tehran accent, also spoke either German, French or English, maintained impeccable eyebrows and complexion as a sign of self-respect.

Though not unique to the upper class, proper self-presentation for them was at the same time an expression of respect and appreciation for those in their company. They excelled in balancing between deference towards elders, mutual respectability towards their peers, and discreetness about their scholarly or financial feats. Like, my fellow bus riders, my friends had also become educated in these sensibilities to fare well in their daily lives among the upper class.

After having finished a master's degree from the best universities, like Tehran, Sharif, Shahid Beheshti, or Allameh Tabatabaei universities, my friends were expected to marry a properly educated and wealthy Iranian man with potential to own or inherit a family business. Another ideal possibility for them would be to accompany their future husbands outside Iran in completing a doctoral program. The pressure they experienced in order to be the same, if not better, than other educated Tehrani was immense. They saw themselves as educated yet 'unsuccessful' when these said expectations were not met.

One of the themes I coded for at this juncture is the hierarchy related to forms of education. The way schooling is valued while other forms of education are devalued is socially constructed and produced.

Because schooling in Iran is synonymous with mastering the sciences, thus technological innovation, schooling is valued over other forms of education such as religious, vocational, and informal apprenticeships. These attitudes and perceptions are tied to systems of power and competing ideologies.

The second theme, the purpose of schooling, is borne directly out of the aforementioned. That is, schooling, as singled out from other forms of education, must then serve a specific purpose, again, tied to systems of power (See De Certeau 1997; Gramsci 1971; Ranciere 1999 & 2011). Universities are idealized as spaces where people learn 'how to' think critically together about their conditions; thus, be able to challenge the hegemony of ideology.

For instance, in Iran students learn how to think critically with others, not necessarily about the Islamic regime, but about American and European global domination. Iranian universities are meant to function as producers Iranian Shi'i citizens that are both scientific and revolutionary in defending the nation from western imperialism.

I use the word *idealize* because "critical thought" must then be related to its

utility, either in service of the state, capital and so on. What does utility of critical thought imply not just in Iran, but overall?

The third theme hinges on human agency – what people do with their education as an apparatus of the state. Here we see that for the the secular-leaning upper class in north Tehran what one does with an education is subject to assessment and social approval. This force risks undermining the purposes of higher education as an apparatus of the Islamic regime as I explain further.

My friends were not invested in becoming the future Shi'i revolutionary citizens the Islamic regime had hoped they would become through the schooling system designed by 1979 revolutionaries. In the company of university-educated Tehranis in different patogh (cafes frequented by people from distinct occupations), they talked about how friends have made it out of the country. Being educated or well traveled was not enough for them. They wanted to see Iran reach its greatest potential in technological advances and social freedoms. They felt hampered, and they placed the blame on what they perceived as two tragedies – the Shah's oppressive rule and the 1979 Iranian revolution that followed. For them, learning how to think together in universities did not result in becoming revolutionaries. A successful higher education was, rather, tied to a checklist, that if fulfilled, would lead to a life that resembled their upper class counterparts in Europe and North America.

In this description, we see that when other ideologies grounded in political, social and economic affiliations compete for the social imaginary, Iranian schooling and higher education objectives are destabilized. Laying this out allows me to interrogate further the more difficult task of coding the following; what constitutes "Iran" for my friends in Tajrish, and what did they mean by technological advances and social freedoms? Who is not considered in their definitions? How? Who is enabled? How?

This brings me to my fourth theme – factors that facilitate. The hierarchical understanding of schooling, socioeconomic status and the exclusion of others

enable the secular upper-class in the public sphere, as Taylor characterizes this (see Taylor 2007). That is, this idealization of higher education as spaces of critical thought overshadows the effects of exclusion.

In Iran, the infrastructure for higher education cannot accommodate all university-age youth. Standardized entrance exams and interviews work to separate those who are meant to take a seat in a university classroom and those who are not. Many Iranians do not make it into universities.

Unlike my friends who came from well to do families and had resources that would guarantee their entrance to the best Iranian university classrooms, there are those from the lower socioeconomic classes and non-urban populations who are unable to compete for a seat in the best universities. They are unable to show their ability to 'maintain' the demands of the university and are excluded from that space in order to make room for those who exhibit required sensibilities. Here we can see that the university as a place where learning to think together takes place is also, and more importantly, a space of exclusion. As meritocracy undergirds school participation, schooling stands as proof for the ability to think critically. Therefore, those who are excluded and then relegated to lesser forms of education are then 'spoken for' or assumed to be represented by those who are privileged to "learn how to think critically with others" in universities. Again, this is not unique to Iran.

This post is a part of Allegra's Summer 2015 Fieldnotes series. See earlier installments [here](#).

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Shoes, walking & reflections on subtle conflicts within social movements

Mina Baginova
September, 2015

In my research, I have found myself walking constantly – primarily because the city where my field site is set breathes with mobilizations these days. Consequently my choice of footwear has become surprisingly important, and not only for comfort.

One day I may be marching with thousands of students, teachers and workers on strike. When we get to the parliament building, we are supposed to take our (preferably very old) shoes off and throw them towards the parliament, a symbolic gesture of solidarity for the two teachers arrested the day before.

However, the square is full of riot police, and those leading the march start to discuss how to proceed. While they are making their decisions, a friend of mine from a feminist group tells me to put on the high-heels that I was told to bring with me. I quickly change my footwear, and start holding a banner for the crowd of female activists who perform a pantomime about abortion and structural control of female body. Some people clap, some look away in slight awkwardness, or even obvious discomfort. The crowd is soon joined by group of activists who engage in the fight with the riot police, causing the march to disperse.

> *This change of footwear illustrates how – because of the diversity of involved groups, initiatives and goals within these social movements -strategies of resistance are constantly being renegotiated.*

The work of activists, of course, goes miles beyond protests and acts of disobedience. Yet, observations from protests illustrate the subtleties of conflicts within these social movements. In a country where the former dictatorship still lives on in conservative attitudes, abortion and the female body in general as an object of repression are still sensitive issues for many.

Class differences resonate in the forms that actions assume during protests – young students from less privileged background whose lives have been affected by police checks and house controls often engage in clashes with riot police. Others are continually haunted by the ghost of dictatorship as they fight for justice for their tortured or disappeared parents. Some avoid clashes with the police and choose journeying as their form of campaigning, others view confrontations as natural and inevitable.

However, these differences do not necessarily indicate a deviation from the more

general practices of social movements. Rather, conflict is an essential element in the fibre of all social movements as "a space of both opportunities and limitations directly experienced by activists everyday" (Maeckelbergh 2009:102).

Thus, conflict bears a potential to become a source of creative energy and ideas – even if in practice restructuring conflict as a source of innovative strategies is rocky. As a researcher, I am constantly aware of the need not to juxtapose activist practices against one another. Rather, I need to understand that a large social movement such as the one I study *depends* upon complex structures, diverse strategies and multiple visions.

Social Movements and 'Radical Imagination'

I have entered the fieldwork in Chile with the notion of 'radical imagination', which forms a conceptual and analytic tool through which I aim to unearth the social and political activities of student social movements. But how does one explore the workings of something that entails so many meanings and different shapes?

What is ultimately a process that has no end point, is perpetually in motion, constantly in a phase of becoming – just like the social movement itself?

On more apparent note, radical imagination may stand for the capacity to imagine the world and collective life in radically different forms from the social, economic and political reality in which people find themselves. However, radical imagination is not merely about dreaming of other worlds. To the contrary, it is a collective process of concrete groups and initiatives within the movement, as they actively work and tangibly transform their struggles against the dominant order (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014).

I approach my field as "active reality" (Cox 2011:33), that is I understand the student social movement as "an actively produced social formation, with historical and social links between its component parts", created by "the ways participants experience themselves" and "the techniques through which they produce, maintain and transform themselves".

While such direction requires to muddle in everyday nitty-gritty of the movement's frustrations and efforts, protests and mobilizations have also proven to be a rich visual source of activists' imagination. Marches become bold spectacles of the radical imagination as banners and posters are transformed into canvas of unapologetically clear ideas of a world as it should and may be otherwise. Moreover, marches also mirror yet another important aspect of the radical imagination, namely the boundless conjunctions of the past, present and possible futures.

> *Activists of a new generation, no longer paralyzed by the fear of past horrors, build their radical ideas and activities on the painful legacy of the dictatorship and accounts that narrate how the world has become the way they experience it today. Simultaneously they reimagine the distorted present with tangible work for the future generations.*

Eduardo Galeano, beloved author of "[The Right to Dream](#)", famously pioneered the importance of dreaming and imagining better worlds, and his words appear frequently painted on posters during the marches. His statements such as *"Allow me, readers, the madness of inventing the future. The world that is upside down dreams that it lands on its feet"* or as the one on the picture *"Education will not be the privilege of those who can pay for it. Police repression will not be the curse of those who cannot buy it"* [1], are chosen by activists precisely for the very tangibility of their struggles.

These words gain their significance from their ability to radically (re)imagine the world of today as the driving force of social movements' activities, which in turn become significant for their capacity for collective, shared – and never-ending –

work for other possible worlds.

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Footnotes

[1] El derecho de Soñar – Eduardo Galeano. Consulted [here.](#)

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