A Claxonomy of Mexico City's Traffic

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Anyone who spends time in Mexico City will spend much of it in traffic. One of the most clogged cities in the world, residents will lose on average 158 hours per year to congestion on the road (Ortego *et al* 2021). In recent years, the city government has sought to limit the number of cars that take to the streets each day, but these efforts have largely targeted poorer people who travel from their homes in the city's outskirts to their workplaces in the centre, rather than those who live and drive short distances in wealthy, congested regions (Guerra and Reyes 2022). So, gridlock continues apace.

Sound File 1: The streets of La Merced, in central Mexico City.

https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/1-Streetscape.wav

There's a frantic sluggishness to Mexico City's traffic; like a hydraulic system under immense pressure, space fills to the extent that it opens. In his book, *Horizontal Vertigo*–named for the feeling of living in a city whose seismicity demands more lateral expansion than vertical–Mexican writer Juan Villoro (2015:54) suggests that,

"[t]oo many days spent in traffic jams makes us idolise speed. To compensate for the incessant loss of direct connections, we believe in alternate routes… in search of a path of circumnavigation, drivers abandon their chosen path and believe a twisting side road will make things better, if only because they keep moving forward."

Anonymous in the inexorable crowd, Mexican anthropologist Claudio Lomnitz (2001:60) that the city's roads supplant the courtesy more typical in Mexican life for a single rule: "don't give away an inch". For this reason, he says, "[d]rivers in Mexico City tend to drive with their eyes pointed straight ahead and cast slightly downward", because if they were to inadvertently make eye contact with another driver, politeness would demand that they manifest them a gap in the logjam.

As drivers jostle for limited space, hands at 10 and 2 and eyes firmly at 12, commuters develop an expanded sensory repertoire to keep moving. Often this involves car horns, which we might understand as a non-verbal form of communication. In Australia, my home country, our lexicon is limited: a horn will either mean "Get fucked, fuckwit!" (cf. Gawne 2016) or "Hey, mate!" But honks have different meanings everywhere (Mahmood 2021). Julia Simon (2012), writing of Cairo, suggests that "[h]onking is a language", and different horns convey different meanings–everything from "You should learn to drive" to "I love you".

Mexico City's streets have a peculiarly large number of endemic sounds (Alba Vega and Rodríguez 2022). When I bring up street sounds with my friends, we invariably begin listing all we can, often reaching 15 or 20 unique sounds that can be heard on Mexico City's streets on any given day. We can add to this the symphony of expressive honks that echo along the city's brimming streets. With

the thickening traffic, the sound of the street increases exponentially, each new car adding to the din while demanding auditory escalation from other motorists. Although the traffic might be stationary, its sound will still travel, overflowing the streets to amble through parks, markets, and the most buffered corners of the city's apartments. Even if you're not on Mexico City's streets, you never really leave them.

Riding my bike through its traffic over the last five years, I've learned by force Mexico City's wide vocabulary of horns. Being able to identify that different vehicles use different honks and toots, and knowing that these will vary according to infrastructure, conditions, weather, time of day, and part of the year, is what Steven Feld (1996) calls "acoustemology": a portmanteau of "acoustic" and "epistemology" that names a sonic way of knowing the world. As sonic practices and expectations accumulate socially and historically, undifferentiated noise becomes differentiated sounds, and Mexico City's streets transform from cacophony to systematic commotion. So, in the interest of systematic knowledge (and public safety), this essay tabulates the streets' honks into a taxonomy of *cláxones* [horns], a "claxonomy" of Mexico City's traffic.

Taxonomies are a peculiar form of knowledge production. Lorraine Daston (2004) shows in her history of botany that taxonomies often use holotypes, which combine the range of peculiarities a species might exhibit into an ideal specimen that has never existed. Concrete abstractions, this attention to minute detail is not only a catalogue of diversity but, as Foucault pointed out long ago, a mode of adjudicating difference that generates an overarching sense of order. By assuming the world to be rational, the taxonomic mind is deeply functionalist–famously, the Russian chemist Dmitry Mendeleev left gaps in his 1869 Periodic Table of Elements for the yet-unknown elements a coherent world would require (Neale, Phan, and Addison 2019).

In their pursuit of the world's universal order, taxonomists seek a universal language that avoids the problem of synonymy–multiple names for the same thing–while their critics point to the hubris of believing that the world's

multitudes could be, in G.K. Chesterton's (1904) words, represented by a "system of grunts and squeals". The categories that taxonomies use might well be arbitrary, a point Jorge Luis Borges (1952) makes when discussing a taxonomy that divides the world's animals into 14 categories:

1. those that belong to the Emperor
2. embalmed animals
3. trained animals
4. suckling pigs
5. mermaids
6. fabulous animals
7. stray dogs
8. those animals included in the present classification
9. animals that tremble as if they were mad
10. innumerable animals
11. animals drawn with a very fine camelhair brush
12. etcetera
13. animals that have just broken a flower vase
14. animals that from a long way off look like flies

It is for these reasons–but most acutely, the rapid collapse of global biodiversity–that the discipline of taxonomy is in crisis (Meier 2008). Fortunately for the current project, neither the traffic nor the horns of Mexico City's streets are disappearing quite so quickly–though Mexico City's Ministry of the Environment did promulgate legislation in 2022 to limit the excessive use of horns (SEDEMA 2022).

In the spirit of classical taxonomy, this essay arbitrarily selects a series of common honks to assert an overarching system of meaning shared by people on Mexico City's streets. While it might sound cacophonous, that residents can distinguish the meaning of each horn shows we're far from Babel; motorists' improvisations are a vocabulary emergent from the demands made by a megacity that is, in Dean Chahim's (2022) memorable phrasing, "governed beyond

capacity". As residents loudly fill the void left by the state with new apparatuses of meaning and management, convention replaces rule so people can keep moving.

I. Honks of misaligned proportion, namely the Metrobús. As these big red buses of central Mexico City approach their stations, you will hear three sharp toots, and you might be surprised that such a long vehicle has so high-pitched a horn. If you're riding your bike in the Metrobús lane (which is a great way to avoid the traffic), you will receive one sustained high-pitched honk, a suggestion that your best interest involves removing yourself extremely quickly.

Sound File 2: Metrobús approaching station.

https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2-Metrobus.wav

II. Honks of false urgency, namely police cars. Several distinct horns will sound from the city's arbiters of order, most of which can be safely ignored. Often, you'll hear a single, sirenless pulse, *baanh* (and sometimes a double, *baanh baanh*), which officers of the law use to advise road-users that, for the good of the people, they are going to have to run a red light. This is the same sound that police cars make as they pass a street-side business that pays officers to check on them a few times a day. If, against, the odds, they're on route to an emergency, they'll have their siren on and they'll be making that same pulse, either repeatedly or for sustained intervals. Of all their sounds, this one might warrant attention, though there are few strict rules when it comes to Mexico City's law enforcement. The city's ambulances use this same pulsing siren during urgent moments, and given that Mexico City has only 45 government ambulances to serve its nine million residents (Ide 2020), it pays to be sure who is honking.

Sound File 3: Single police pulse.

https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/3-Police-Pulse.wav

Sound File 4: Double police pulse.

https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/4-Police-Double-Pulse.wav

Sound File 5: Pulse with siren.

https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/5-Siren-Pulse.wav

III. Honks that make visible the invisible, namely motorbikes. At quieter intersections, cars tend to approach without slowing down, so motorcyclists, worried they might not be seen in time, will let out one to three (1-3) quick toots. As a rule of thumb, the faster the motorcyclist is travelling, the closer together the toots. Depending on which part of the city you are in, this will begin a little before 6am and continue until about 10pm.

Sound File 6: Motorbike approaching intersection.

https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/6-Moto.wav

IV. Honks that turn public space into personal territory, namely cars. There is a wide vocabulary for car horns, which I will organise from least to most irritating:

1. There is the watchful driver, who will offer a single, very slight honk as they pass a double-parked car whose door might fling

open, or at a driver who seems like they might stray from their lane. We might think about that honk as translating to "*¡Aguas!* [Watch out!]". It is generally not followed by another honk but it might be extended into a firmer, longer blast if the honking driver feels that the driver of the car in question might be inattentive or unpredictable.

Sound File 7: Patient Watchful Car
https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/7-Patient-Watchful-Car.wav
Sound File 8: Concerned Watchful Car

https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/8-Concerned-Watchful-Car.wav

2. You can distinguish the watchful driver from a frustrated one by the presence of a second honk. If a driver impinges on another, they will receive a one-short, one-long pair, with the length of the long honk relative to the frustration of the driver.
   Sound File 9: Frustrated Carhttps://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/9-Frustrated-Car-Mild.wav
3. This double honker, however, might transform a regular driver into an affronted one, as they will, in response, offer up to four honks (three short, one long) to declare that they have been wrongfully impugned and that it is the double-honker, in fact, who is out of line.
   Sound File 10: Wrongfully Impugned Carhttps://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/10-Wrongfully-Impugned.wav
4. Like the nervous motorcyclist, an impatient driver who is approaching an intersection without wanting to slow down will lightly tap the horn with their fist or the ball of their palm, making

between one and several dull honks, which advises unseen cars that right of way, road rules, and common courtesy will have no bearing upon this intersection for the next three to five seconds, and that everyone else would do well to monitor the speed with which they approach.

Sound File 11: Impatient Carhttps://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/11-Impatient-Car.wav

5. A late driver, who has realised only after a traffic light has turned red that they must immediately relieve themselves of the intersection, will blow multiple medium-length honks back-to-back until they have cleared the area.

   Sound File 12: Semáforo Carhttps://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/12-Semaforo-Car.wav

   - As per IV2, these multiple medium-length honks will often be met by a smattering of frustrated two honkers, from irritated drivers who have been forced to wait longer.
   - As per IV3, these two-honkers might in turn be answered by a few four-honkers from people who didn't hear or see the late-crosser, and have interpreted the two honkers as having wrongfully been directed toward them.
   - Also as per IV3, the original two-honker might then become annoyed that the later four-honker has wrongfully interpreted that they were wrongfully interpreted, and will offer them a further corrective four-honker.
   - This ongoing saga will distract drivers, causing one of them to realise only after a light has turned red that they must immediately relieve themselves

of the intersection, and steps IV5(1)-IV5(4) will repeat for a few cycles.

6. A peak hour driver, trapped in a choking avenue, might blast one long, extended honk, which other drivers might join, offering street-side apartments a fanfare of futility.
   Sound File 13: Trapped Carshttps://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/13-Trapped-Cars.wav

V. Honks of the heavens, namely the pastry cyclist. The finest honk that you will hear in all of Mexico City: the angels of baked goods. A morning blessing, squeezed in bursts of three to seven by a cyclist with a large basket of pastries, these endearing, welcomed toots echo through quiet streets between 7am and 10am each day, and a little later on Sundays. If you're in a car and want a sweet treat, be careful which honk you use to get the cyclist's attention–I'd recommend a sharp whistle.

Sound File 14: Pastry cyclist

https://allegralaboratory.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/14-Pastry-Cyclist.wav

At peak hour, cars on Mexico City's avenues travel just a little faster than walking pace (Crôtte, Noland, and Graham 2009), while the speed of sound is 340.29m/s (at sea level; because of its altitude, even sound slows down in Mexico City). If we were to categorise the components of Mexico City's cars according to their capacity for movement, the horn would then have to be its most mobile, its possibility for and range of movement growing in tandem with the stuckedness of the vehicles that honk it. As these sounds weave between congested cars, drowning out and being drowned out by other horns, merging into a single force, travelling out of the city to the mountains that hem it, ricocheting back and

radiating out anew, they articulate an overarching feature of the city's social life, one whose restless audibility defies the stasis of what can be seen.

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Nicky Falkof’s ‘Worrier State’ – Part 1

Julis Koch
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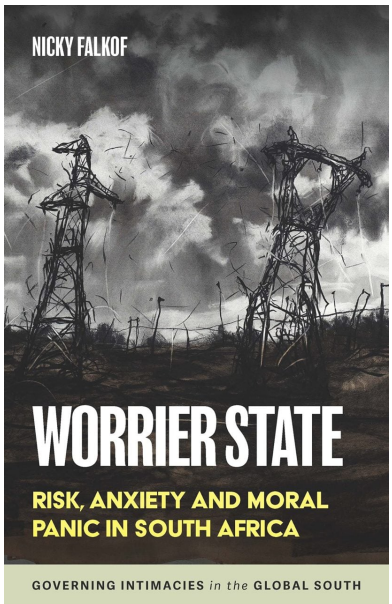
Falkof’s book discusses the everyday experiences of fear and moral anxiety in the city of Johannesburg in post-apartheid state South Africa. Drawing on narrative accounts from political protests, mainstream and social media as well as interviews, Falkof juxtaposes publicly propagated motivations for crime, femicide,

racist as well as anti-racist political discourses with the structural, historical and socio-economic circumstances that informed such 'episodes' in the first place. Falkof's implicitly activist critique of South African media is socio-political throughout the book: Episodes of fear, anxiety and violence in the country require careful contextualisation when written and circulated widely. Falkof also directs her attention southward by reflecting on meanings of modernity, fear and safety in 'the more dangerous megacities of the south' (2022: 19). While these "universal" epistemes are formulated largely in and by developed countries (Mulisa in Falkoff, 2022: 18), their experience in South Africa and other southern cities represents a different kind. Indeed, "[…] the uncertainty that people face on a daily basis as a consequence of corruption, ineffectual government, unreliable infrastructure, inequality, violence and climate change […]" (2022: 19) can hardly be compared to "the speculative anxieties" experienced in the safer societies in the West (idem).



In chapter one, Falkof's theoretical entry sets the tone for a promising analysis. However, it unfortunately remains a somewhat loose beginning in the end, such that the reader waits in vain for it to integrate more deeply with the argument and case studies to follow. Not expanding on the creation of experiences of fear and anxiety in an equational sense of their production, Falkof considers the experience of emotion and fear as of a more loose, associative nature, constituting a rather constant condition of experience in modern South Africa. If Falkof offers anything conceptual, it is that emotions follow behavioural patterns and performances, which form part and parcel of a wider underlying sociality (Ahmed in Falkof, 2022: 15). Narrative, Falkof finds, and mediated narrative in particular, is thus a particularly useful methodological vantage point from which to understand the otherwise only vaguely theorized experience of emotion as a collective and social event. Falkof finds it is an 'invaluable approach to […]

anxious episodes […] here' (2022: 6). Indeed, for Falkof, narratives are an entry point to a wider socio-political critique.Falkof finds that public and social media narratives are particularly well suited to contest hegemonic truths; effectively, they may point towards 'the vulnerability of modern state institutions' (idem).

Over the course of four different case studies from the years of 2011 to 2014, Falkof documents how news and social narrative strategies often conceal rather than uncover the socio-economic circumstances that condition experiences of fear and uncertainty in the first place. Chapter 2 deals with the narrative strategies around the phenomenon of 'white genocide' and 'the marketing of minority victims'. Chapter three addresses media reports on two distinct cases of murder, according to which young students were supposedly the victims of various forms of religious and spiritual cult killings. Falkof presents a popular urban legend on so-called 'plasma gangs', drugs and crime in Alexandra in chapter four, and in chapter five, juxtaposes narrative communication of 'safe selves' to the ones of 'good selves' in one of Johannesburg's comparatively well-off, middle-class suburbs.

> *Falkof exposes the argumentative strategies that form the basis of allegation for 'white genocide', highlighting the groups' techniques of 'reverse racism'.*

Falkof begins her illustrations by discussing a demonstration of about 160 white Afrikaners who protested against what they and other political activists in the past have called 'white genocide'. 'Plaasmoorde' (Afrikaans for 'farm murder'), occasional killings of individuals at South Africa's farms, represent for some the intent to extinguish white Afrikaners in the country. A form of racist rhetoric deployed by the former apartheid state, it is the contemporary diction that explains not only violence, but also unfavourable policy decisions which overall are experienced as outcomes of discrimination by white Afrikaners who affiliate themselves with extreme right political activist groups such as AfriForum and Red October. Falkof exposes the argumentative strategies that form the basis of allegation for 'white genocide', highlighting the groups' techniques of 'reverse

racism'. Illustrating how they, for instance, appropriate the minority category (2022: 53), contest and counter official numbers and meanings of farm murders (2022: 65), and re-circulate refurbished versions of the black 'communist menace', Falkof points out the remnant legacy of racialised fear of the former apartheid regime (2022: 69). Falkof's concern is rooted in the ideological, and fear-inspiring character of the groups' sociopolitical campaigns: 'Regardless of how many people in South Africa actually believe that a genocide is occurring, this weaponisation and marketisation of the anxiety that is a constant component of South African whiteness help to keep racist ideas in the forefront of national debate […]' (2022: 73). The narrative of 'white genocide' serves to illustrate contemporary sociopolitical engagements with a not so distant apartheid past. It taps into the white population's long existing fear of loss of status and power in the country – a historical fear recycled for contemporary political purpose and circumstance.

'Christian nightmares', chapter three and the second case of Falkof's presentation of fear episodes in the country, problematises two different murder cases. In both instances, narratives of satanism inspire what Falkof considers a moral panic, distracting from alternative, less sensational and potentially socio-economic circumstances surrounding and – at least implicitly – informing the murders. By firstly re-visiting 'the Theologo murder' thus named after the victim, Falkof works out two divergent narratives that emerged over the course of moving from crime to trial. One, pushed forward by the mainstream media, highlighted the murderers' supposedly satanic intentions when they set Kirsty Theologo and her friend Bronwyn on fire. The other one, unfolding throughout the court trial, suggested that the violent attack, after which Kristy Theologo died of severe burnings in hospital, occurred against the backdrop of challenging socio-economic living conditions, and was at least partially motivated by romantic jealousy. The 'Dobsonville killings', in which Thandeka Moganetsi and Chwayita Rathazayo were killed on their way home from school[FC1] , were equally framed as satanic. In this case, however, court proceedings remained closed to the public and little information was available to the media that could have countered

speculations of satanism. Falkof criticises that '[w]hile neither of these perspectives placed the murders within patterns of gender-based violence in South Africa, it is nonetheless significant that community members often located the deaths as part of a generalised satanic threat […]' (2022: 105).

Central concepts of analysis in this chapter are Hannah Arendt's banality of evil as well as the concept of the spectacle, which, in these instances, resulted from what were clearly femicides committed at the time. Falkof is unsatisfied with the 'devilish' evocations in public media reports that these murders were satanic (2022: 82). For her, the actual evil – and banality thereof – resides in the concealing effects of occult narratives in the first place: 'it is easier to pray for redemption from the devil than to acknowledge the social causes of South African men's seemingly infinite capacity for violence' (idem). Even if the latter may represent a somewhat sweeping statement of South African men's susceptibility for violence in general, Falkof's dissatisfaction with the analysis of media reports on the one hand, points towards the exceptional effects of satanic beliefs on the other. Falkof also draws attention to Stanley Cohen's expression of so-called folk devils (2022: 86), again alluding to an apartheid phenomenon that has remained central to public discourse since. Historically, folk devils represent the structural fear of the white Christian [and apartheid] nation, which potentially is endangered by a 'violent African nationalist revolution', unruly youth and corrupting foreigners. At times, contemporary myths explaining violence such as the sample cases of femicide in the country as something motivated by the broad category of evil find their origin in racist apartheid history, Falkof suggests.

> *Falkof's objective is to draw attention to those aspects of the plasma narrative that distinguish it from stories of 'normal crime'.*

Chapter four on 'plasma gangs' stealing plasma televisions in Alexandra township, Johannesburg, addresses fears of burglary amidst working class aspirations for a more affluent life. According to urban legend, gangs would break into homes to take plasma televisions not for their monetary value, but because they contained

ingredients to make nyaope, a drug also known as wonga or whoonga (2022: 114). Falkof's aim is not so much to focus on the case of drug use in this section of her book. Instead, her objective is to draw attention to those aspects of the plasma narrative that distinguish it from stories of 'normal crime' (2022: 115); Falkof is interested in urban legend, in other words, and how that very legend informs a sense of fear and anxiety in Alexandra's communities and beyond. Falkof is eager to invalidate claims to the mysterious consistency of plasma as white powder right at the beginning of the chapter; according to the legend, it is not so much the technology of 'plasma' that criminal groups are after, but a small amount of magnesium oxide that 'coats the display electrodes in a thin layer' (idem). While they may not be relevant necessarily to understand how urban legend works and travels socially, the facts of what the alleged plasma gangs are actually looking for are central to Falkof's argument. For Falkof, the urban legend of plasma gangs exemplifies the multiple social problems rampant in Johannesburg's townships (2022: 117): there is the aspiration to consumption and material wealth on the one hand, and the regularity of theft and crime in the face of drug use and poverty on the other. Altogether, Falkof thus explores the urban myth of plasma gangs by disassembling it into its various narrative components (mainstream and social media, interviews). By highlighting the many factual gaps in public media reporting and reflections of select focus groups, Falkof seeks to emphasise how 'a tale of gangster criminality, personal danger, magic, violence and fear offered a way to foreground the contradictions that come with living in the South African township, a place that both interpellates residents as aspirational neoliberal citizens and consistently imposes conditions of insecurity upon them' (2022: 148).

In the final exposition of life in Johannesburg, Falkof moves the focus away from narratives of genocide, murder and crime, towards more subtle and less visible scenes of insecurity and racism. In the comparatively affluent, 'tree-lined suburban neighbourhood' of Melville (2022: 151), practices of 'community-making' entail 'paying attention to who and who does not belong, while another part involves a collective performance of altruism […]' (Falkof, 2022: 152). Ultimately, these appearances are what help local communities distinguish safety

from insecurity, those who belong from those who do not. What Falkof observes in the conversations of the online Melville Facebook community group 'I Love Melville' (ILM) to which Falkof belongs, is the twofold desire to enact and be seen as virtuous and good (idem). Falkof coins the term of 'good whiteness' (2002: 154), a form of South African liberalism defined by 'a politics of pity that is concerned with the goodness of the giver' rather than the structural formations of racism and inequality that are a legacy of the apartheid state (idem). Falkof drives home the argument by foregrounding liminal as well as bohemian ways of living in the middle-class suburb. Melville is close to both poorer and more dangerous neighbourhoods of the city as well as to the supposedly more affluent ones; it is also characterised by a comparatively diverse group of residents in terms of race and class (2022: 161). In some ways, Falkof returns to the theme of the second chapter of the book and continues to examine whiteness and white identities in South Africa (2022: 161). Falkof historicises white communities' continuously anxious behaviours around the need to feel safe against the backdrop of subliminal racist claims to legitimate white culturedness. There is, for instance, the seemingly unspoken belief circulating that cities were made possible through white civilisation, ignoring black migrant labourers' efforts that helped build them (Nuttal & Mbembe in Falkof, 2022: 161). Somewhat accordingly, fear of difference in the Melville neighbourhood is exercised through disparaging Facebook comments complaining about the homeless 'window waherrs' and proto-criminal car guards (2022: 166-167). At the same time, the ILM Facebook group exhibits what Falkof describes as contradictory performances of anti-racism to these very comments (2022: 170). Praiseworthy at first glance, Falkof relies on Ahmed to critically assess such contradictory behaviour: often, written disapproval of racist behaviour lacks efforts for redistribution and action for more structural change (idem). More fundamentally, Falkof takes issue with the striking contradiction between 'middle-class anxieties about safety and neighbourhood character' and 'the urge to be seen doing good' (2022: 178) when reviewing white middle-class habits of saying good but changing little.

'Worrier State: Risk, anxiety and moral panic in South Africa' reads as a radical

> *prompt for South African public media, with a call to look more closely at the anxieties, crimes, murders and politics driven by and in South African communities.*

Overall, Falkof's account reveals what myth may conceal: the socio-political and economic circumstances that constitute the origin of scenes of violence, crime and conflict. 'Worrier State: Risk, anxiety and moral panic in South Africa' reads as a radical prompt for South African public media, with a call to look more closely at the anxieties, crimes, murders and politics driven by and in South African communities. Throughout the book, Falkof demonstrates the centrality of public and social media narratives as well as the impact that legend, myth and rumour can have in the collective processing of 'episodes of fear', anxiety, racism and violence in Johannesburg. The methodical and detailed reviews of mainstream news coverage, social media conversations and urban legend across four different 'episodes of fear' demonstrate the ways in which narrative is appropriated by some white South Africans to twist historical legacies of the apartheid state in favour of their contemporary fears. Falkof's book equally argues that even if white South African citizens are conscious and aware of racist undertones in their midst, all-encompassing socio-economic change requires more than moral outspokenness when witnessing individual cases of racism and injustice. Even more so, according to Falkof and the scholars referenced, such outspokenness seems riddled with charitable humanitarianism that is concerned primarily with the act-of-help-as-performance-to-be-seen; it often omits the recipient or structural political origin that gave rise to the instance of injustice, racialised inequality and need for help in the first place. One note of omission pertains to the rather scarcely theorised concepts of risk and fear. Clearly, Falkof's central object of study is discourse describing very concrete instances of violence, crime and racism in the country. Falkof addressed this at the beginning of the book, emphasizing how the four case studies deal with emotion and anxiety in their broadest, social and collective sense. Given the descriptive and astute analysis of South Africa's *zeitgeist*, it may have made the argument stronger to clearly connect the theoretical dots between public narrative and collective fear or to not

draw on affect theory at all. Ultimately, it remains up to the reader to consider this either a serious analytical shortcoming, or an unnecessary side-note to what is an otherwise succinct critique of South African public and social media discourse: why not more accurately represent the many socio-political and economic challenges that inform actions of crime, violence and racist narrative in the country? The answer to this may certainly be worth another book.

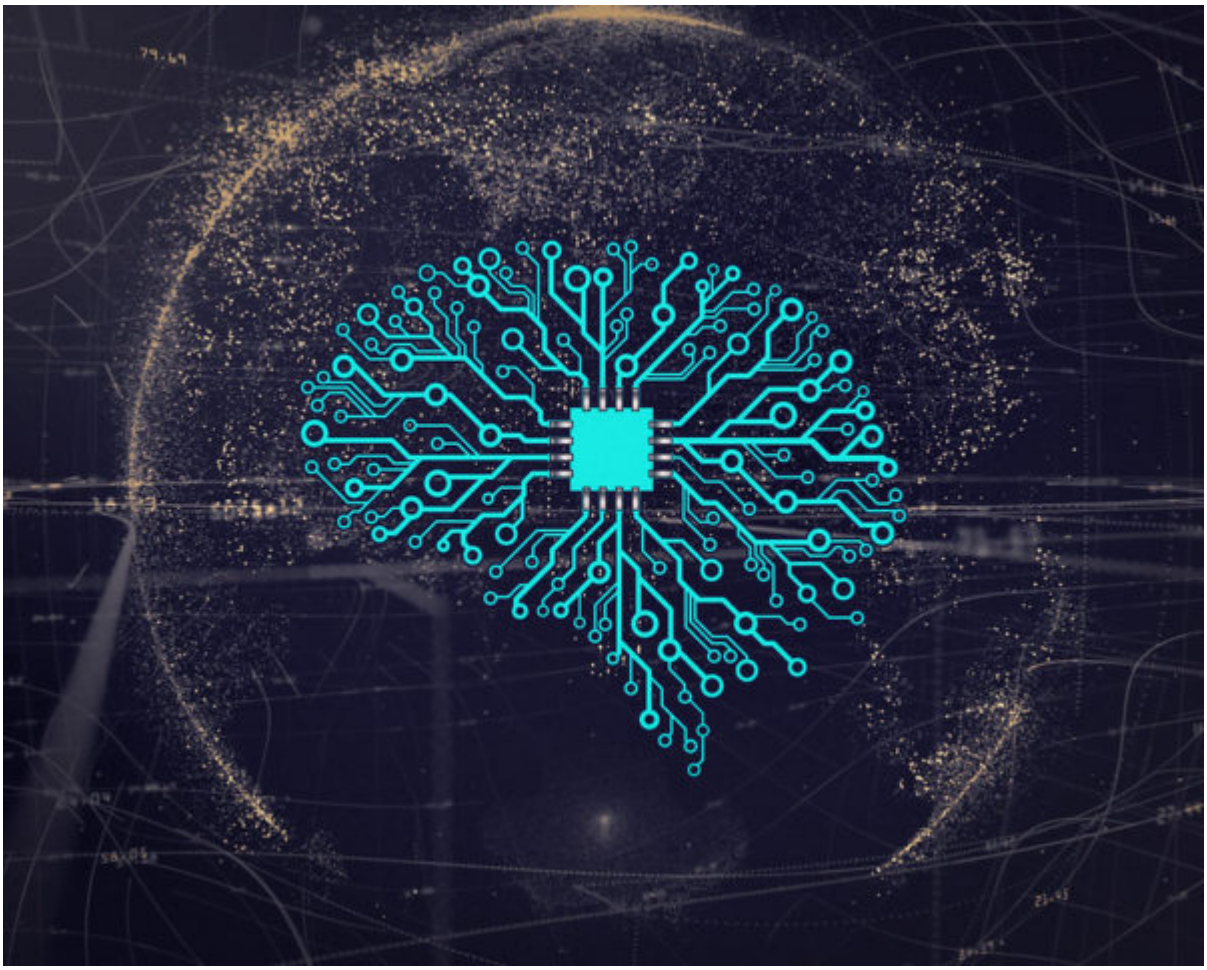
Reference:

Falkof, N. (2022): *Worrier State. Risk, anxiety and moral panic in South Africa*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Featured image by United Nations Photo, courtesy of Flickr.com.

How to use health technologies to "kill one little deer in the dark forest"

Leah Junck
March, 2023



There is a global push towards making AI more ethical and transparent. As critical contributions on the topic of AI have pointed out: even when computational applications are considered self-learning, there are always humans involved whenever they come into use (see e.g. Gray and Suri, 2019), often providing invisibilised labour from the global South (Irani, 2015.; Moreschi et al., 2020). In the wider public discourse on AI, this is often reduced to the phrase 'human in the loop'. A recent experience led me to ponder on the relationship between technology and this 'human-in-the-loop' beyond the debates I had been following. More specifically, it made me reflect on something I think of as the capacity to 'expertly improvise'.

> *Even when computational applications are considered self-learning, there are always humans involved whenever they come into use, often providing invisibilised labour from the global South.*

Let me explain. Not long ago, my mother went for a breast examination because of a visual irregularity. Her gynaecologist of many years, whom I call Dr Schäfer here, had decided to refer her for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), a technology that produces three-dimensional and very detailed images of organs and structures inside the body. This was an unusual response since the mammogram, a low-energy X-ray examination commonly used for breast cancer screening, had not flagged anything unusual. Nor had the ultrasound that was done subsequently on her breast using high-frequency soundwaves to create an image of what lies underneath the skin. Given that there had not been any tangible findings with the previous two diagnostic technologies, the doctor who was now doing her MRI expressed surprise that my mum had been sent to him and that Dr Schäfer had gone through the trouble of making sure her insurance covered the procedure.

The reason that Dr Schäfer had acted was her familiarity with my mum's history of breast cancer and the rest of her medical record. While her intuition and initiative did not produce immediate clarity, it proved to be warranted. A third instrumental intervention, the MRI pictures with sensitivity to soft tissue parts of the body that can be hard to see in other imaging tests, retrospectively justified her inquisitive response and showed that there was indeed *something*. The next step was to do a needle biopsy to sample that *something* and determine the presence of cancerous cells. It would thereby also determine the course of my mum's next stretch of life, who had been counting down the days towards the freedom of retirement.

There was another problem, though. The surgeon now had to guess where the biopsy had to precisely be taken, because the ultrasound that would have guided him to locate the *something* identified by The MRI was still not picking anything up. He resolved to take five different samples instead of just one to increase the likelihood of penetrating what the MRI had contoured. For my mother, this meant both an excessively tender and swollen breast for a more than a week and uncertainty in terms of whether a negative result would actually be that – a negative result. It could just as well be a mere swing-and-miss extracting

neighbouring healthy tissue as opposed to what might be invasive, unhealthy material.

Due to my current research interest in technologies and trust, I found myself surrounded by books on the social aspects of Artificial Intelligence. My scepticism towards the routine application of algorithmic solutions had only increased the more I engaged with the topic on a theoretical basis. While the sources I learnt from were engaging and shaped my way of thinking, they often still felt removed from my own experiential realm. At some point began wondering whether an algorithm could not have guided the surgeon based on the coordinates from the MRI. Despite my cultivated apprehension of AI solutions, I would have very much welcomed such a calculated interference in the form of a precise technology at this point. The prospects of predictability and encryption suddenly appealed to me much more than they had just reading about them. Perhaps also because the examples that are typically referenced as facilitators of questionable social practice are often automated processes with very little human input and capacity for divergence/thinking outside an algorithm-like set of rules.

AI in its current forms is known to have limited abilities; it cannot do a range of tasks but rather specific ones very precisely and fast – given the weeks that had already passed waiting for medical appointments to become available, this seemed enticing. At the same time, if automated image analysis based on algorithms and the mammogram had been the sole ground for decision-making (instead of giving weight to the acquired expertise of Dr Schäfer), this would have meant an immediate dismissal of the entire situation because earlier imaging had been negative. The visual symptom at the top layer of my mum's body would have been bypassed because it did not align with the image material produced of the inner life of her body. Consequently, she would never have had the MRI to begin with. The language spoken through the use of medical technologies could have easily drowned out my mother's (and by extension a lot of other peoples') concerns.

I came to think of improvisation as a vital skill and framework that could be

really useful when evaluating ways in which technologies become integrated into systems.

Improvisation as an idea is frowned upon – in medicine especially – and even seen as unprofessional. Despite the institutionalisation of checklists as the normative gold standard, there are many situations and contexts in which professionals deviate from them (Timmermans and Epstein, 2010). I came to think of improvisation as a vital skill and framework that could be really useful when evaluating ways in which technologies become integrated into systems. It helps rendering communication humane and stepping away from a categorically clear-cut way of processing information. What is more, thinking of improvisation as something that is grounded in expertise and not necessarily something that happens ad hoc (Bertram and Rüsenberg, 2021) also means giving more weight to the unique communicative and empathetic capacities of the 'human in the loop' within care systems that pull together various highly specialised competencies.

What really sat with me at the end of the day was that there seemed to be a dearth of answerability in each of the diagnostic stops entailing both human and technological intervention (apart from Dr Schäfer, with whom my mom had built a connection). In fact, there was a carelessness with which my mother was left waiting for results and was forced to make multiple follow-up phone calls. Uncertainty is part and parcel of these kinds of life junctures. And the segregation of a check-list expertise from experiential processes of coming to a diagnosis is a general problem. However, taking technologies and their analytic and communicative capacities for granted as part of a process might make doctor-patient exchanges, already critiqued for becoming increasingly routinised, ever more bereft of the relevant linkages that form part of a *care*ful communication. Accountability, or a lack thereof, has been problematised for AI implementations in recent years. But that is not so much the case for older and more established tools that have become very much built into healthcare processes. With the ultrasound not showing the area of concern, the biopsy was taking place in a manner the doctor referred to as 'randomly shooting into a dark forest in order to

kill one little deer.' Instead of suggesting another approach, the surgeon sent my mother home to wait for a result that would not be one unless it flagged cancer.

It was not just Dr Schäfer's proximity to my mother and her ability to empathise with the situation that enabled her to offer care in the most fundamental sense of the word. By that, I mean more than sterile, elusive medical phrases and an acknowledgement of the torment of the ongoing state of uncertainty. It was her willingness to move away from the script: to improvise. And her resistance to being part of and routine/automated process of care involving a myriad of technologies and specialisations. The lack of precision was not predominantly a problem of the equipment that was being used. Ultimately, when the first, more random biopsy failed to produce any usable results, a way was found to take an accurate sample by inserting a wire into my mum's breast during an MRI – a very painful but ultimately worthwhile process. It was rather the feedback-loop between doctors and patient that illustrated the more relevant dearth of clarity and a profound risk of disconnect between lived realities and formularised medical practice. Creating this feedback loop becomes even harder the less funds are available for healthcare, forcing medical partitioners into a machine-like role in processing their patients.

> *With AI being perhaps in some cases self-learning but not capable to improvise and invent algorithmic dictions anew, feedback and translation into the right kind of language seems central in making human-centred decisions with technological assistance.*

Cybernetics is a term often used in the context of automation and regulation. Margaret Mead summarised the then state of the art understanding of the field as "a way of looking at things and as a language for expressing what one sees" (1968, p:2). This includes an emphasis on 'feed-back' and making things understandable outside of disciplinary specialisations. With AI being perhaps in some cases self-learning but not (yet?) capable to improvise and invent algorithmic dictions anew, feedback and translation into the right kind of

language seems central in making human-centred decisions with technological assistance. Building on a language that does not insist on zero-sum diagnostics — and I would imagine most of those concerned with the topic of automation would agree — is indeed essential when machines and their algorithms form part of care relationships. Especially so when communication happens across specialisations. Part of this language or repertoire, I believe, is the ability to act intuitively and to expertly improvise.

Algorithms can be described as socio-technical assemblages, pointing at the relationality between humans and codes. There have been numerous calls to pay attention to these interactions, and analysis often focuses on relationships with information and understandings of what is real and desirable more broadly speaking. As of yet, there is still little insight into what that means for individual experiences. Where technologies form part of biomedical care and the language spoken between patient and doctors (often in the plural with different specialisations and their specific parlance), there are different versions or contextualisation of reality being processed. For the surgeon, there was no next logical step to follow after the unusual event of technological unresponsiveness. This was simply not part of his operational checklist or algorithm. Instead of communicating this to my mum, he explained that what the MRI had flagged could be 'anything' – without any explanation as to what this semantically empty word might entail.

The technological inventions that were part of the entire medical process my mum had to undergo to find answers are pretty much taken for granted and not considered AI. The term 'MRI', for instance, rings a bell for many as a singular medical prognostic approach or as an uncomfortable experience of lying very still inside a large tube. Rarely are these machines explained in their precise functionality or as part of a larger care process. Yet, it makes sense to consider the dialectic human-machine relationship and render its tensions more remarkable. Technologies may be precise, but they cannot communicate – or at least not in a way that humans will find satisfactory (everyone who has ever bothered with a chat-bot on a website or with voice recognition when not having a

‘standard accent’ will agree). Often, technologies are not even fully understood by those who use them, or by those who are advised to make use of them. They also cannot explain what an occasional glitch in their enviable precision means for individuals’ realities – let alone suggest alternative routes to their calculated logic. Broadly speaking, few would want machines to single-handedly make important decisions, unless one would be the one to make a financial profit from it. The wealth of human experience, the ability to expertly improvise while weighing different scenarios, cannot be imitated and digitally outsourced.

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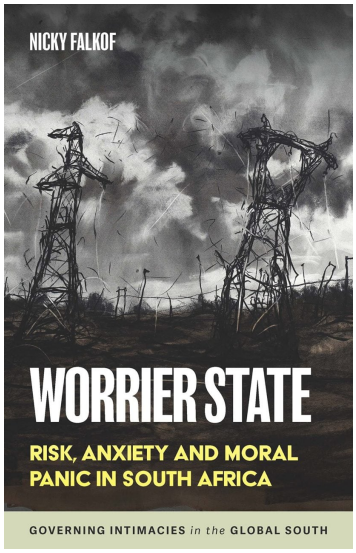
Featured image by Mike MacKenzie, courtesy of Flickr.com.

Nicky Falkof's 'Worrier State' – Part 2

Hanno Mögenburg
March, 2023

Falkof, Nicky (2022): *Worrier State. Risk, anxiety and moral panic in South Africa*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.



South Africa 2022 is a troubled nation: a continuing energy crisis is grinding the economy and disrupts daily life by recurring infrastructural breakdown; a grotesque level of corruption, a shattered public service apparatus and an uninspired political class infuriate public discontent; rising cost of living, joblessness and over-indebtedness of private households put people under stress, while dreadfully high rates of gender-based violence, everyday crime, and xenophobic mobs are threatening on an existential scale. Thus, fear and anxiety are some of the most significant if not dominating emotive features for all South Africans across all milieus as they navigate life in the postcolony. Following what has become known as the 'affective turn' in the humanities and social sciences, we learned to understand feelings and emotional expressions as fundamentally cultural categories (Clough and Halley 2007; Ahmed 2004). Given post-apartheid South Africa's many reasons to worry about, a comprehensive analysis of what we can learn about the political, economic, and cultural conditions underlying seems long overdue.

With her new book *Worrier State. Risk, anxiety and moral panic in South Africa,* Nicky Falkof, associate professor of media studies at Johannesburg's Wits University, gives a concise account of this while delivering an insightful inventory of South Africa's contemporary emotional landscape that is fraught with the country's painful history of violent entanglements of race, class, and gender.

Building on her previous work, for example on representations of satanism, murder, and whiteness (2016), Falkof traces different narratives of fear to account for how affective forces in public discourse are inseparably linked to negotiating questions of belonging and identity within South Africa's new post-apartheid order. To this end, she treats circulating stories, rumours and urban

myths as ‘ethnosociologies’ (Waters 1997) and – instead of only deconstructing them for the fictions they are – understands them as sites of communities’ “narrative world-making” (192) and, in a sense, as ordinary social theories that comment on some of the most pressing issues in the country today. As they are “implicated in the social, spatial, cultural and economic patterns that structure South Africa in multiple ways” (28), the author demonstrates how each of such stories evokes symbolism, actors, and antagonisms that are specific to certain publics. Thus, Falkof argues, fear is both experience *and* practice, people actively partake in discourses of fear “with agency and impact” not only by sharing them but through the way they tell them as well: “[w]e share these stories by choice and often exaggerate them in the telling. We use them to encode diffuse moral messaging […]” (13).

> *Indeed, South Africa is a striking example of a Global South country where ‘cultures of fear’ are not only nurtured “by politicians and media for strategic reasons” but also resonate with immediate, real life threat.*

The book exemplifies four different cases of such public responses to instances of violence and crime and relates them to the local conditions of perceived risks and insecurity they are embedded in. These cases are framed by a prefixed theoretical discussion of which bodies of literature on affect and emotions Falkof’s work links to, and a strong conclusion on the state of emotions in South Africa. Therein, it is argued, that although fear being a significant symptom to what Zygmunt Bauman called ‘liquid modernity’ on a global scale, as a response to the insecurity of ever-changing political and economic structures, it is very well worth taking a look at how local specificities of this phenomenon materialise in the South African context (10-11). Indeed, South Africa is a striking example of a Global South country where ‘cultures of fear’ are not only nurtured “by politicians and media for strategic reasons” but also resonate with immediate, real life threats (19). This makes South Africa a productive case for theoretical knowledge production on such phenomena rather than a mere instance of empirical variation, a “derivate” or “mimesis” of Northern occurrences (7).

The first of Falkof's examples deals with the ludicrous myth of a 'white genocide' in South Africa: congenial to studies about narratives of white supremacy groups and the far right in Europe or the USA, she explains how white Afrikaner interest groups act as "moral entrepreneurs" (26) capitalizing on this fiction. To those who buy into this conspiracy theory, a selective perception of violent robberies occurring at remote, white-owned farmlands as revanchist hate-crimes – although clearly blown out of proportion and ignorant to the circumstances of these instances as well as to the daily level of violence non-white people endure throughout the country – resonates with a feeling of general insecurity stemming from high crime levels as well as the loss of privileges for example by Black Economic Empowerment Programmes (BEE) after liberation. The term 'reversed apartheid' is in fact on the tip of the tongue of many white South Africans, irrespectively of how they position themselves politically, as probably most who are familiar with this specific South African context might have experienced. Against the background of an accumulation of several of the above-mentioned crises, and behind the 'safe' walls of fortified middle-class homes, it is easy to sense people's growing unease and resentments. Their neurotic anticipation of immanent disaster is inscribed into 'white talk' (Steyn 2005) at dinner parties, Whatsapp-groups or at school gates, and it is not uncommon to hear it merge into restorative dismissal of the democratic project since 1994. Johannesburg's characteristic urban anxiety (Falkof and van Staden 2020) and the defence of white entitlement are some of the main reasons for such protruding fears among the white population.

> *A particular strength of this book in this regard is Falkof's status as an insider to this 'world'. Identifying as a white resident of the neighbourhood herself, she reflects on a suspenseful ambivalence: while unavoidably being complicit in the production of difference in this locality by enjoying the animosities of white middle-class positionality, it also equips her with the necessary privilege to access white spaces and echo-chambers in order to develop critical accounts.*

Suitably, another chapter of the book deals with rather moderate manifestations

of such motives and dissects identity constructions through the online discourses of an affluent suburban neighbourhood in Johannesburg. The themes of online conversations among residents in a Facebook group disclose the precarious base of whiteness in the post-apartheid society as they revolve around a paradoxical undertaking. On the one hand, residents eagerly perform their compliance with post-apartheid's prescribed "hegemony of liberal whiteness" (154) by overemphasizing acts of charity and subscription to the desegregation of living environments after the end of apartheid law. On the other hand, residents' recurring complaints about noisy clubbers from other parts of the town, homeless people and alleged criminals and drug users are strikingly directed against the usual suspects. Fear of crime and the feeling of danger in white talk, Falkof argues, continue to be associated with the male Black body (153), reminding of apartheid times paranoia of the 'swart gevaar' (the 'black danger') and are hence articulated in fantasies of purity and exclusion from the local community. While property ownership and manifestations of class distinctions play a role in this, proxy discussions on the "neighbourhood character, about appropriate behaviour, about authenticity and origins" (115) clearly expose the persistent symbolic order of apartheid's social and spatial engineering and thwarts the neighbourhood's self-imagination as an open-minded, bohemian, and diverse residential area (155).

A particular strength of this book in this regard is Falkof's status as an insider to this 'world'. Identifying as a white resident of the neighbourhood herself, she reflects on a suspenseful ambivalence: while unavoidably being complicit in the production of difference in this locality by enjoying the animosities of white middle-class positionality, it also equips her with the necessary privilege to access white spaces and echo-chambers in order to develop critical accounts.

Fear of crime and violence, however, is not exclusive to white and/or affluent communities, as a large corpus of literature from urban studies covering fear of the privileged, for example by highlighting their "architecture of fear" (Lemanski 2004), critiques of gated communities and affluent segregation suggests (see e.g. Caldeira 1996; 2001). Highlighting and illustrating this fact is another merit of

this book. This representational bias applies to popular and media discourses on townships and informal housing spaces in South Africa as well. Apart from Soweto, the country's biggest conglomeration of townships that became a tourist hotspot covered with national heritage sites, other places like Alexandra, considered as spaces of poverty, illegality and danger, still owe to be represented appropriately in all their innovations and contradictions, multiple social, economic, and cultural realities. Falkof, on the contrary, works out how for example economic stratification and relating consumption and aspirational consumerism, just as fear of being expropriated from one's valuable possessions, are as much part of normality here as elsewhere. According to stories that circulated a few years ago in Alexandra, an ominous syndicate of Nigerian drug dealers were incriminated with violently robbing expensive flatscreen TV sets to 'harvest' the magnesium oxide they contain, in order produce a common street drug. Taking example of this local rumour, the author situates these narratives within histories of racialised consumption, police corruption, morality and enviousness, that are also linked to the demonization of drug addiction and xenophobic sentiments against African migrants. The chapter can be read as a counterpoint to the two chapters on (white) suburban anxiety I described above, which enables us to chart South Africa's emotional landscape more comprehensively.

> *Thereby it applies beyond the South African context: at times when coming climatic upheavals, tirelessly evoked 'culture clashes', predictions of infrastructural crises and the shortage of public goods ignite anxieties worldwide, this book is an important reminder*

As Falkof emphasises, the narrative function of myths is to enable public disengagement with the root causes of the problems they imply. This meta-interpretation is applied for another chapter discussing media representations of the murder of a young woman at the margins of Johannesburg's township periphery. Falkof argues that dominant representations of the murder as an occult, Satanist ritual crime is symptomatic of the reluctance of the South African

(media) public to acknowledge the endemic nature of gender-based violence (83). The author situates this and a tragically long list of other instances within a greater analysis of the functional role these constructions of exceptionality have in popular discourses. Referencing Baumann's theory of modernity again, she writes: "the category of evil exists to help us explain the inexplicable […] But the category of evil can also allow us to *make things inexplicable*, thus avoiding the need for closer examination. Discursively constructing certain types of acts simply as 'evil' (specifically, in these cases, as satanic) can free us from the need to consider them more carefully as a part and consequence of social, political, historical and economic structures" (81-82, italics in the original).

Taken together, the four chapters offer a multifaceted, sensitive, and inspiring analysis of the socio-cultural foundation of feelings, and are a strong example of how social media platforms as well as mass media do amplify these cultural articulations of affect. Thereby it applies beyond the South African context: at times when coming climatic upheavals, tirelessly evoked 'culture clashes', predictions of infrastructural crises and the shortage of public goods ignite anxieties worldwide, this book is an important reminder. Not only of how our attitudes and reactions to that are entangled to our troubled collective pasts and determined by contemporary economic and social positionalities. But also for how those anxieties become very dangerous vehicles for political mobilization, for example when seeking comfort and relief from reactionary, authoritarian forces and their political projects.

For everybody interested in the South African context, it is a must-read. But due to the author's accessible and pointed style, *Worrier State* is also highly recommendable to readers across various disciplines, from political anthropology or social psychology to urban studies, for all interested in affect and phenomenology, the experience of postcolonial urbanity, intersectional feminist approaches and critical race theory.

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Photo by Gregory Fullard on Unsplash

Save the Open Learning Initiative for Refugee University Education in Europe

Allegra
March, 2023

Allegra Lab expresses its concerns over Central European University's (CEU) unexpected decision to close the Open Learning Initiative (OLIve), a university refugee education project established in Budapest in 2015. The abrupt termination of the Director's contract, Ian M. Cook, and his replacement by an external staff member without the consent of the Project Lead represents a grave

breach of academic freedom. Furthermore, and most importantly, such a decision threatens the education and future prospects of one of the most vulnerable populations in Europe.

The existence of OLIve, set up initially in Budapest as cooperation between CEU community members and local grassroots groups, sent a strong message to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's authoritarian government, even as it forced most of CEU's activities out of the country to Vienna (where OLIve also ran programmes). It was a strong sign of the University's longstanding commitment to the promotion of democracy, open societies, and the right to education, especially for those whose lives are daily threatened by Europe and Hungary's exclusionary migration policies.

As OLIve's project team explains it in a recently published public statement, "1,400 students of refugee backgrounds have graduated from OLIve programs, making it one of Europe's largest refugee higher education programs. It has been replicated at four other universities, and internationally recognized through grants and awards." This makes it a highly successful model of broadening access to higher education for displaced learners that has been emulated elsewhere, and is hugely relevant at a time when many European universities profess easier access for refugee students but sometimes struggle to do so in practice.

The new rector of CEU, Shalini Randeria – an anthropologist who, we would have thought, should be aware of education's significance for marginalized populations and for democracy more generally – did not give any reason for the sudden closure of the initiative at the end of this academic year. In its statement, the OLIve Team also highlights that it was confident it would be able to raise the necessary funds to continue its activities given its outstanding track record.

As members of Allegra Lab's collective, we urge the academic community in Europe and beyond to join forces and express its strongest support for the OLIve's team which has worked with refugees with great dedication in an extremely hostile environment for the past 8 years and to publicly condemn CEU's

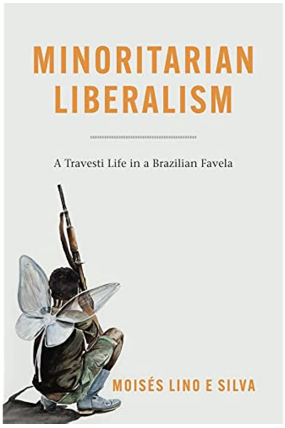
unilateral and incomprehensible decision. We believe that it is anthropologists' moral duty to stand in solidarity with all those who resist the rise of nationalism, racism, and xenophobia in Europe.

We therefore encourage our Allies to show their support by making public statements through their groups, associations and/or professional bodies. A public petition can also be signed here. We sincerely hope that CEU's Rector will revise her position so as to allow OLIve to continue to defend the values for which CEU was initially created.

[DISCLAIMER: Allegra Lab have known about the closure of OLIve for the past 10 days, as its (now former) director, Ian Cook, is part of our editorial collective. We have previously taken a stand on issues of academic precarity and misconduct and will continue to do so]

Minoritarian Liberalism: A Travesti Life in a Brazilian Favela

Aadarsh Gangwar
March, 2023



While a graduate student in social anthropology, Moisés Lino e Silva's curiosity about the scarcity of freedom and lack of liberty in Brazilian favelas led him to Rocinha, the largest favela in Rio de Janeiro. Once in the field, he quickly realised that his interlocutors did enjoy freedom and liberty, just of a different nature than he had set out to explore. Over the course of the next decade, his project transformed into a study of the "conditions of possibility for favela dwellers to enjoy freedoms" (xi), which has culminated in his debut monograph titled *Minoritarian Liberalism.* The book raises pertinent questions: "What are the multiple forms that liberalism assumes in Brazil?" (xi) "Are liberal values only considered legitimate when they align with European and North American standards?" (16)

In what follows, Silva disentangles "the standard and universalising mode of liberalism" (11) from its vernacular counterparts. The broad arc of his argument is that *liberalismo* (the Portuguese equivalent of liberalism) and *liberdade* (a colloquial/emic Portuguese term that encapsulates notions of both liberty and freedom) be considered distinct from and at par with Euro-American, normative liberalism. By doing so, he asserts that *liberdade* is not an adaptation of

normative liberalism. He also salvages vernacular liberalisms from the anthropological critique of Euro-American liberalism's colonial origins and effects. This crucial departure from contemporary work on liberalism rectifies a regrettable oversight. If the trend has been for anthropologists to avoid studying liberalism because they "fear an alignment with normative liberalism" (188), this book boldly seeks to reverse it, drawing a distinction between anthropology with a normative liberal bias and the critical anthropology of and for liberation.

> *Silva disentangles "the standard and universalising mode of liberalism" (11) from its vernacular counterparts.*

Yet, one might ask, why study *liberdade* in relation to hegemonic, normative liberalism in the first place if it is indeed a politics and a practice in its own right? The distinction Silva draws between *liberdade* and normative liberalism is not as straightforward. The public in Rocinha do not celebrate normative liberal values. Nor do they outrightly reject notions of freedom and liberty. A third form of engagement, the one Silva argues he found within Rocinha, entails neither acquiescence nor rejection, but rather working on the exclusionary forces inherent to normative liberalism and "transforming" them for the purposes of people in Rocinha (188). Silva conceptually frames this engagement by drawing on queer theory and performance studies, in particular José Esteban Muñoz's work on disidentification.

The strategy of disidentifying with normative liberalism allows Rocinha dwellers to articulate numerous non-normative vintages of liberalism. Silva refers to these as minoritarian liberalisms, which include "favela liberalism, queer liberalism, peasant liberalism, maroon liberalism," (12) and so on. He outlines three characteristics that define minoritarian liberalisms. Firstly, they differ from normative liberalism in that they do not share in the latter's tendency to impose universal standards (as such, they deterritorialise the field of liberalism.) They are espoused by groups that occupy a potentially subversive position in society vis-à-vis dominant groups. Secondly, minoritarian liberalisms substitute a more

“collective mode of politics” (13) for normative liberalism’s individualism and nation-state centrism. Finally, exploring minoritarian liberalisms involves, among other things, “creating ever more radically mutant modes of freedom” (21), which are traced onto varying everyday experiences of liberty and freedom, and are enabled by unique material circumstances. As such, minoritarian liberalisms expand the ways in which subjects can be free.

> *His conviction that freedom be understood as a practice expressed in, for instance, bodily form led him to “trace some of the concrete operations of freedom”.*

While the questions raised in the book might appear philosophical, Silva’s strategies for answering them remain decidedly ethnographic and rooted in lived experience. His conviction that freedom be understood as a practice expressed in, for instance, bodily form led him to “trace some of the concrete operations of freedom” (18). This involved taking note when vernacular Portuguese terms for the concepts of liberty and freedom appeared in everyday speech, then unpacking the empirical context in which those words derive their meaning and the significance those words lent to speakers’ actions.

Silva confronts his positionality at several moments in the book, for instance in relation to how “not being heterosexual was critical to facilitating [his] relationship with Natasha and others in the favela” (11). At the same time, he leaves the reader curious about the relationships his positionality precluded. This repeatedly appears to be a significant aspect, from when he received criticism from his neighbours for hanging out in a “morally degraded” part of Rocinha, “a zone of double abjection” (98), to some unappetising interactions in the Brazilian hinterlands (78-79, for instance). To his credit, Silva does a commendable job throughout the book of laying bare his preconceptions (see 42 and 112), as well as reflecting on how his initial plan to study the limits to freedom in Rocinha influenced what he was able to learn during his time there. Extended a little further, his perceptiveness regarding the relationship between his identities and

the connections he made (but also did not make) in Rocinha could have given readers a richer, contextual understanding of minoritarian liberalism, especially in relation to the presence hegemonic liberalism within Rocinha itself.

> *As it appears in Minoritarian Liberalism, normative liberalism seems almost to be a caricatural foil.*

By its own admission, the book can propound a rather flattened conception of normative liberalism at times. One strategy to avoid this could have been to better parse the various possible aspects of life in which liberal values can be championed — economic, socio-cultural, political — and map out which vintages of liberalism concern themselves to what extent with each of those aspects. As it appears in *Minoritarian Liberalism*, normative liberalism seems almost to be a caricatural foil. This is hardly a demerit, since Silva does not profess to have written a book about normative liberalism, quite the contrary. Nonetheless, it might be a hiccup for readers more fastidious about political theory, and blunts the force of his argument at times.

Minoritarian Liberalism is a pleasure to read and advances anthropological scholarship and the craft of ethnographic writing. It draws on various current debates and interestingly pulls together a range of theorists and scholars that have not always been in conversation with each other. The book convincingly argues in favour of reconceptualising liberalism, vindicating the experience of freedoms and liberty at the margins of society not only from the universalising effects of hegemonic forms of liberalism but also from overzealous scholarly critiques of liberalism writ large. Further, it initiates, rather revives, an important conversation, pointing readers in directions that, while beyond the scope of this book itself, require further inquiry. What explains the universalising tendencies of hegemonic forms of liberalism? Are non-hegemonic variants of liberalism minoritarian by virtue of the socio-economic standing of their proponents or by virtue of their internal logics alone? How can we push further an approach centred on understanding freedom and liberty as practice and how could such an

approach better articulate with an understanding of liberalism as a political ideology? In provoking these questions, *Minoritarian Liberalism* marks an important advance in a vital broader conversation.

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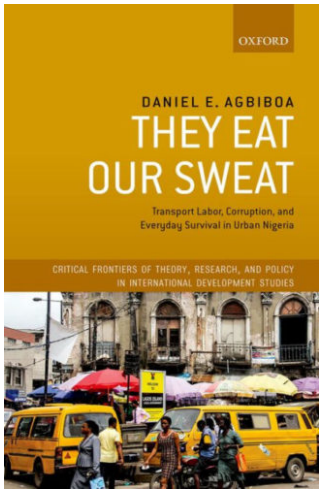
They eat our sweat

Jing Jing Liu
March, 2023



In *They Eat Our Sweat,* Daniel Agbiboa engages the road transport sector in Lagos, Nigeria, to reveal how corruption operates through a dialectical "double capture" of state and society. Ethnographic encounters in the bustle and bottleneck of urban thoroughfares expose the precarity of informal transport workers who operate minibuses and drive motorbike taxis. Their everyday survival demands acts of petty corruption: bribery, fraud, and patronage. Daily confrontations with transport associations and unions, such as the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), law enforcement agents, and government officials ensure endemic compliance with their extractive practices. Simultaneously, these intermediaries entangle street-level with state-level corruption. The latter includes extortion,

embezzlement, and grafts characteristic of grand corruption in a political economy dominated by trickle and surge of oil wealth.

Documenting the inseparability of petty and grand forms of corruption allows the book to transcend a standard celebratory evaluation of the informal economy and its praise of entrepreneurial actors. Instead, the book offers a sobering account of paired predation. Indeed, personal and archival accounts support new analytical approaches attentive to the "mutuality" of corruption. Corruption is perpetrated not just by government officials who exploit public office for private gain. It is also deployed by citizens who might criticise corruption but are complicit in its perpetuation for daily survival. Yet, "the logic of mutuality has yet to penetrate the existent literature on corruption in Africa" (Agbiboa 2020: 16). Without reservation, this book corrects the chronic myopia in development literature that sees the state as the source *and* solution of corruption, while obscuring the role of ordinary citizens.

By collapsing the supposed distance between street- and state-level corruption, Agbiboa joins the ranks of anthropologists, such as Daniel Jordan Smith (2010, 2022) in demonstrating two key points about corruption in Africa. First, average citizens may not be the willing accomplices of corruption but are wilful in their participation. Repeatedly, the stakes of refusal trump moral condemnation. Second, the paradox of supposed "weak states" is laid bare. Corruption *strengthens* rather than undermines state power. Here, informalization is often mis-characterised. Perceived as the state's retreat from ordinary citizens, informalization represents a mode of recruitment by the state to further entrench corruption in everyday lives.

Agbiboa's investigation into the mutuality of corruption between state and society picks up where Daniel Jordan Smith left off in his seminal account. In "Culture of Corruption," Smith addresses the discursive and narrative aspects of "Nigerians' experiences and understandings of the state," (201: 15) rather than the state per se. Moreover, Smith traces the downward and outward siphoning of money to fulfil kin and community obligations by those in positions of relative power.

Conversely, Agbiboa traces the upward distribution of financial flows. Money moves up a chain of collusion. To illustrate, drivers "settle" motor park touts (*abgeros).* They, in turn, pool the money to pay-out association chairmen. Then, money lines the pockets of local politicians and police chiefs. Trapped in inexhaustible circuits, the multiple practices of state actors and informal workers highlight the banality rather than the exceptionality of corruption. Consequently, readers will appreciate this portrayal of state corruption inhabited by identifiable actors and dirtied hands, as opposed to shadowy figures of political power. Overall, these tentacled transactions show how money greases everyday access, protection, and mobility on Lagos' roads.

> *Agbiboa's investigation into the mutuality of corruption between state and society picks up where Daniel Jordan Smith left off in his seminal account.*

Together, these accounts deepen our collective knowledge of corruption in practice and in excess of the Weberian bureaucratic ideal for how modern democracies ought to function. However, a position that contests the abstract neutrality is not an immediate appeal to human relationality. Agbiboa writes against what he perceives to be an over-prioritisation of neo-patrimonialism in studies of corruption within international development studies, political science, and economics. These disciplinary defaults to essentialist, culturalist, and functionalist rationalisations curtail more fruitful explanations. In contrast, the book advocates for anthropological approaches that eschew definitive distinctions between state and society, much like the misleading divisions between formality and informality, or illegality and legality. To assert that distinctions are overdrawn is not equivalent to stating differences do not exist. A critical message from the book is that people's relationship with them are inconsistent, rather than deterministic.

The uncomfortable colonial inheritance of political structures, bureaucratic ideologies, and legal frameworks invites studies of actual order and operation in Africa. Shifting the scholarly gaze "from government to governance in the

developing world" (Agbiboa 2020: 23), the author explains how statist aspirations can paradoxically escalate both precarity and corruption. For example, the transformation of Lagos into a "global city" foremost involved purging informal workers from its environs under the aegis of law and order. Conversely, informal workers also sought legal recourse. Drivers and associations took Lagos State government to court to claim their collective 'right to the city'. Underscoring ordinary people and elites' use of the legal system challenges prevailing analysis that enshrines African nations as lawless or outside of the law. In a similar vein, Samuel Fury Childs Daly (2020) provides an account of law and crime during the Biafra-Nigeria civil war. Daly attributes fraud, duplicity, and forgery–the polysemic grammar of corruption–to the constellation of "martial skills" (Daly 2020) necessary for survival. Whereas Biafra disappeared in the aftermath of war, these "skills," on the other hand, outlasted their rogue purpose. Fraud for survival was thereafter criminalised in favour of reconciliation and order. What is clear, however, is that malfeasance is enabled through intimacy with the 'proper' functions of bureaucracy and legality, rather than its removal. Intriguingly, today's mutuality of corruption features as a distant and distorted artefact of these wartime tactics. Incorporating the antecedents of law and crime could strengthen the book's argument against neopatrimonialism and its essentialising tendencies.

> *They Eat Our Sweat ably demonstrates the generative capacity of corruption to reproduce its own conditions of survival.*

This book shares with scholars the unexamined assumption gleaned from informants that corruption hinders development and prosperity. A recent study by Yuen Yuen Ang (2020) on China challenges conventional wisdom that corruption hampers growth. One limitation of mutuality is that it rehashes the ideological mood of Africa's corruption as generative of replicating daily life, but ineffective for growth and rather corrosive on development. Yet, Ang (2020) presents China's nexus of corruption and capitalism as exponentially productive. This commentary is not a call for comparative work but an invitation to avoid reifying Africa as "all

that is incomplete, mutilated, and unfinished, its history reduced to a series of setbacks…" (Mbembe 2001: 1). For instance, Nigeria and China are near neighbours on the annual Corruption Perception Index, collected by Transparency International (Ang 2020). Why then, is China corrupt and rich, but Nigeria is corrupt and poor? Africa's continued exceptionalism can also be a shortcoming in the appraisal of corruption. Integrating its myriad varieties, such as grand and petty corruption, increases the richness of accounts but might also sacrifice analytical specificity. It also strikes at whether corruption ought to be the dominant window on African governance. Nonetheless, the book's strength is to entice the reader to learn more about how corruption actually works. If China is an outlier in the productivity of its corruption, it is also an analytical lodestar worthy of comparative contemplation. *They Eat Our Sweat* ably demonstrates the generative capacity of corruption to reproduce its own conditions of survival. What remains unanswered is the effect of corruption on economic growth and development. What can the specificity of corruption in various predatory states reveal if poverty is not inevitable? If corruption is the critical barrier to wealth in Nigeria, what might be learned from "the paradox of prosperity and corruption" in China (Ang 2020: 20)?

Deploying mobile ethnography – moving with people on the go – befits an ethnography of transport. It allows Agbiboa to "experience firsthand the violent and shifting mutualities between law enforcement agents, transport unionists, and mobile individuals" (Agbiboa 2020: 34). A fast pace of prose mimics the urgency of urban life. The reader joins passengers in the sticky heat of crammed buses as they lurch and loiter along the road. The palpable danger of transport work is weaved into the analysis with skilful restraint to avoid descending into a genre of suffering so prolific in studies of survival in the global south.

> *The reader joins passengers in the sticky heat of crammed buses as they lurch and loiter along the road.*

In Lagos, it is a given that everyone is involved in corruption. Few people,

however, wish to speak of their own involvement. A proxy method of an "alienation effect" (Agbiboa 2020: 40) is used to elicit depersonalised evaluations of other's corrupt behaviours. But it leaves the reader wondering how prone such a method is to exaggeration of the distance between evaluation and action. While not limited to this study, but a perennial concern, when people implicate others but excuse themselves. Agbiboa asserts that performance itself is telling. However, we remain unsure of what it purports to expose. Moreover, it has the unintended effect of accentuating a polarised moral valence, as people gleefully highlight the shortcomings of the government while accentuating their own vulnerabilities and struggles.

This book is part of a series to advance theory in international development studies. As such, it targets practitioners, policy makers, scholars and students of a discipline steeped in a pedagogy that views the state as the sole architect of corruption. Furthermore, its patent rejection that corruption in Africa is "sui generis and an indigenous pathology" (Abigboa 2020: 207) encourages and emboldens new interpretations. For anthropologists, however, the arguments in this book are familiar. For this reason, it is a boon to the discipline. The paradox of "criticism and complicity" (Abigboa 2020: 2) is an adept 'translation' of anthropology's canonical ideas of cultural coproduction.

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Featured picture by Michal Osmenda, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Call for papers: EASA LAWNET workshop

Allegra
March, 2023

From Critique to Political Practice

12 May 2023, University of Sussex

Dear colleagues,

We are delighted to invite you to submit a paper abstract for the workshop ‘From Critique to Political Practice’ organised by the European Association of Social Anthropologists’ (EASA) Network on Anthropology of Law, Rights, Politics and Governance (LAWNET) in collaboration with Allegra Lab.

This one-day workshop will take place at the University of Sussex on 12 May 2023, but online participation is also possible. The event will be open to the public

and will be broadcast online on Allegra Lab.

Thanks to funding from the University of Sussex and EASA, we are in a position to contribute to travel and accommodation costs for up to eight early career / precarious / unemployed colleagues travelling within Europe. You do not need to be an EASA member to participate in the workshop, but we will ask that you join the LAWNET mailing list.

Please send your paper abstract (max 250 words) to easalawnet@gmail.com by 1 February 2023. Kindly specify whether you would like to apply for funding to contribute to your travel and accommodation costs in your submission.

Warmest regards,
The LAWNET convenors: Agathe Mora, Julie Billaud and Judith Beyer

Workshop rationale

What is the role of researchers in articulating critique in a time of heightened political, social, economic and environmental upheaval? What kind of critique is necessary, possible, and useful in our current times, when the very idea of critical thinking seems threatened by authoritarian, illiberal power and post-truth politics? As such, we ask: What are the moral implications of a social science that remains mostly concerned with critique? What are the limitations of such a framing outside the walls of academia? What alternatives do we have?

Linked to this conceptual preoccupation is a practical one. In a time when critical perspectives are often not welcomed by institutionalised power, ethnographers face ever more difficulties in gaining and maintaining access to legal and governance institutions. What does increasing institutional closing down mean for political and legal anthropology as a field of research, but also of practice?

Brought together, these ethical and methodological dynamics in many ways reflect the balancing act between pragmatism and utopianism we also witness in our interlocutors' experiences. These experiences, which chart a delicate track

between utopia and dejection can serve as a yardstick for our own reflexive practice, beyond the intellectual double impasse of cynicism and relativism. As such, we encourage participants to reflect on the positionality of political and legal anthropologists as researchers-in-the-world and, through this, on the future of research on legal and political processes.

Featured image by Thom Milkovic on Unsplash

MOVING THINGS // HELPERS CHANGING HOMES

Yuka Oyama
March, 2023

What roles do things play in the context of forced migration? How do things become a vital source in the constitution of a sense of (new) home? Which promises, emotions, hopes, and expectations do they carry?

The artwork HELPERS CHANGING HOMES (2018), exhibited in MOVING THINGS, On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration (Forum Wissen, Göttingen from October 28th, 2022 until January 15, 2023) is based on a very personal exploration by Berlin-based artist Yuka Oyama about personal possessions in

moments of radical uprooting. Working with mobile individuals of various backgrounds and living a nomadic life herself, the artist suggests that for mobile people, after many relocations, material things — more than national identities, culture, ethnic communities, gender roles, tradition(s), etc. — become key, stabile, identity markers. They create a sense of home and, through Yuka's work, find their ways into participatory performance, parades and exhibits.

Yuka Oyama is a visual artist, who employs life-sized wearable sculptures, performance, jewellery, and video to think about what is 'home' for nomadic people. The artist's original training as a jeweller transpires in her fascination for things that are deemed special enough to be carried on the body, as well as thing-person relationship between adorned objects, their wearers, and persons' subjectivities. Yuka's sculptures are often worn in public theatrical settings. They encourage participants to feel more imaginative, experience moments of connection to human and non-human actors, and act beyond set conventions. Since 2019, Yuka is Professor of Craft (Jewellery Art) at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

HELPERS CHANGING HOMES (HCH) (2018) is the first iteration (in a series of three) of Yuka's practice-based artistic research Power of Small Things (2017-ongoing). In this artwork, the artist has collaborated with individuals who have experienced more than thirty transnational and national relocations.

This artwork was produced during Yuka's artist-in-residence in Wellington, New Zealand. To produce HCH, Yuka applied her unique methodology: 1) conducting qualitative object-based interviews with individuals who had experienced more than thirty relocations; 2) designing costumes for each person that visualized their personal narratives; and 3) undertaking a parade-like performances with the interviewees.

This text records a dialog between two curators of the exhibition MOVING THINGS, On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration, Elza Czarnowski (E) and Friedemann Yi-Neumann (F), and Yuka Oyama (Y). From a conversation about her

artwork, we segued into dicussions around ‘home’ and migration.

E: As a jeweller by training, you have developed close observation into intrinsic relationships – both physical and psychological – between adorning objects/clothing and their wearers, especially how they affect each other. How do adornments participate in creating someone’s social identity? In other words, what is the reciprocal physical and psychological affection of adornments and (their) wearers?

I am fascinated with the physical and psychological interrelatedness between adornments, mobile personal possessions, body, and personhood. I draw a reference to one of the five kinds of self-knowledge raised by Ulric Neisser, the ‘ecological self’. He describes it as perception of the self in the physical world of one’s body, where everything that a person is wearing and which moves with the body such as clothing, jewellery, glasses, prosthetics, etc. is also felt as a part of the corporeal self:

The ecological self is the self as perceived with respect to the physical environment: ’I’ am the person here in this place, engaged in this particular activity… In particular, anything that moves with the body tends to be perceived as part of the self…What matters is not possession or contact but agency and co-ordinate movement.[1]

Especially when people go through frequent uprooting, the previous contexts, who they used to be, seem to become irrelevant in the new context. While possessions can help reiterate, remind us, and hold onto the previous selfhood, especially clothing, they can also instigate the ‘otherness’ and make differences visible in the new context, since cultures have their own dress codes.

E: You always involve participants in your projects. Could you describe your work

process?

Y: When I work on my projects, I usually start from conducting object-based interviews with individuals who have first-hand experience in the topic that I am investigating. For example, this work was about persons who had moved around at least thirty times both domestically and internationally in their lives. The first step was to find the people and conduct interviews. When the interviews ended, I selected seven stories. I then translated them into seven wearable sculptures. I normally try to design the sculpture based on personal narratives with some abstractions, which are my interpretations. In the next step, I invited the interviewees to try out the wearable sculptures. I asked how I should correct forms, scales, and weight distributions. After I added changes and finished the sculptures, I invited them to take part in a performance. We rehearsed for several afternoons. The performance took place in a public space, which I also filmed.

> *For some interviewees, it is the exactness of ambient, the same sound, brightness, physical activities that are facilitated through things that constitute a sense of continuous home.*

E: I have read in some of your notes that your participants have expressed feeling transcendental and free after a performance. Did their participation in your project as a whole feel like a transition for you too? Would you call this a healing process?

Y: Yes, I also felt a kind of transition. But no, this was not intended as an act of healing like art therapy. This kind of artwork resembles theater, film, and dance productions. It creates a family-like community. Many people contacted me through emails and expressed how this project provided them time to reflect upon uprooting experiences in depth, and how much they were surprised by discovering extended meanings and associations that their personal possessions carried and revealed. For example, many participants responded that specific things make home:

Having a sewing machine defines home. If I am only passing through a city, I cannot have a sewing machine. But when I stay in one place longer, I can have it.

For some interviewees, it is the exactness of ambient, the same sound, brightness, physical activities that are facilitated through things that constitute a sense of continuous home:

The sound of a clock ticking connects many fragmented homes that I have lived in. Does not matter where I am, clocks tick at one constant speed … [The sound] grounds me. It gives an illusion that I am always in the same space.

F: During the HCH parade, you say that some participants felt 'caged' due to the heaviness and design of the sculptures. My thoughts relate to the term cage here. What is the relation between 'capture' and 'captivity' in representing, elaborating or displaying homes?

Y: In HCH, worn sculptures are temporary protections like ephemeral home places, which separate the private sphere from the public. What I emphasized was a shelter-like space like a shell or a façade of a building that replaces individuals' self-representations that hides and makes them anonymous, where they can observe other actors. The home at the same time also 'cages' the wearers/residents. Even though from inside we may disagree and revolt against histories, heritage, rituals, rules that shape us in this space, the home passes down these integrities in us. Once we leave home it becomes evident what these assets are. As we gradually settle in and don ourselves with a new skin—another home—we incorporate the unfamiliar and new environments on the surface, but at the same time we realize some sort of core elements like rituals, value system, bodily activities, habits, and belief that we carry from previous homes stay intact. Embodied.

F: My question aims more at the different ways that we as artists, scholars etc. can represent homes or home issues and such lived experiences avoiding ‘fixation’ of differences and providing situated and gradual ones instead. Isn’t what curators do in museums partly comparable to making homes?

Y: Your analysis is inspiring. I believe the most direct and effective way of conveying the idea of home transformations and commensal act of home-making in my artwork is to participate in the project. The second most direct way of understanding these aspects in my artwork is through wearing the sculptures. Unfortunately, this cannot be experienced because I got rid of my sculptures. So, in this exhibition, I restage and narrate the past event. By this I wanted to emphasize that even a seemingly stable home is transient.

E: According to your essay on HCH, you mention that: “[t]he notion of home offers qualities such as protection, security, familiarity, love, comfort, and relaxation.”[2] But is home really what everyone is looking for? Isn’t there another, maybe contrary notion: freeing oneself from spatial and social confinement, newly inventing ‘the self’ by applying chosen or invented practices vs. ‘traditional’ or remembered ones?

Y: This work deals with non-geographically-bound-home, where a home-base is

frequently changing. Whether the new environment provides more freedom or confinement depends on the direction of moving/travel, and where you come from. There is privilege in having certain ethnical backgrounds in all directions of transnational relocations. As you say, 'freeing oneself from spatial and social confinement' can be relevant, which results in having little practice in staying long enough at one place.

E: Is privilege also an issue, reflected primarily in the voluntary nature of (mostly financial/work) mobility? To what extent have you learned that things become helpful and relevant to other causes of migration, especially in flight and displacement contexts during the research?

Y: Privilege is certainly an issue, but disorientation and reorientation are commonly experienced in diaspora. I have been examining different causes of nomadism such as numerous transnational/national relocations, long-distance vocational commutes, and children who are raised in shared-parenting parallel homes. What I have been learning is inventions of individual methods to prompt ongoingness. I think these methods are transferable to various reasons for migrations, especially flight and displacement.

F: Apropos ongoingness, do you consider home something that can be brought over?

Y: Do you mean bringing people over through objects that are props and prompts to stage home?

F: No, I meant bringing over what can be used to make home but also home as a scientific or artistic object. There is a distinction between the transformative objects of your work and the artistic material transformation of 'the object', for example, the sewing machine. Your transformed objects cross private and public realms, you negotiate intimate home issues across different spheres and boundaries. Going back to our previous discussion about parallels between home-

making and exhibition-making: in homes, these boundaries might be intimacies, while in museums the showcase's glass protects things. As home researchers, you and I might have different ways of working on and presenting homes and correlates, but we might negotiate similar issues of in/visibility, dis/closure and presentation.

Y: You raise a very remarkable observation and comparison – glass vitrines, homes (buildings), and museums; in/visibility, dis/closure, and anonymity. Showing something very private in public space through custom-made worn sculptures is what I try to do with my artwork.

> *Whether the new environment provides more freedom or confinement depends on the direction of moving/travel, and where you come from.*

E: The security conferred by a glass case and feeling secure at home might be similar, but differences arise at several levels, too. The vitrine can be seen as a safe space, but safety from what and for whom?

F: There are social and cultural differences about visibilities and invisibilities and the boundaries of home. As Pauline Garvey[3] has shown in her work on different communities and home boundaries in Norway, dissimilar homes have different forms of keeping and maintaining intimacy. Don't you think that it is also necessary to reflect on the boundaries and constraints of museums in similar ways? The showcase might be considered a safe space for the exhibit or an unnecessary barrier preventing interaction, depending on the point of view.

Y: As you mention, the critical difference between the two spaces, a private home (that is neither a temporary shelter nor institutionally created space) and a museum, is how people inhabit the space. In the museum space there might be no sense of ownership unless one is the owner of a private museum. Similar parallels can be drawn to IKEA showrooms or model showrooms of real-estate, where mess and personal traces that come from habituating the space are hidden and controlled.

F: This is an interesting point. I don't think there is no sense of ownership regarding Museums. The ownership of museum objects is currently heavily contested in the face of colonial violence and dispossessions. Might it be that you are rather referring to the difference between formal ownership and inhabitation?

Y: Yes. Inhabitation. What I mean is traces of living. A space that allows dwelling as well as storing and bringing in any items necessarily for homing without negotiations. Rooms that contain or have reminiscence of smell, sound, orderliness, and chaos—evidence that someone or some people have spent time to settle in. Do you anticipate visitors staying for long and returning – making themselves at home?

E: We would very much like to expand the space to include more than the classic museum functions. Several steps have been made in this direction: the free entry policy, but perhaps more importantly an education program, which offers dialogical exhibition tours in several languages. Visitors are, for example, encouraged to sit down at a canteen table and listen to different stories around the topic of food. Of course, there is still a long way to go in opening museums to all.

F: The visitor's view is something I would like to ask you about. Do you know how the audience has in the past understood and interpreted the wearable sculptures?

Y: At the site of performance, where no information was provided, people did not take any notice of the performance. They just walked by as if there was nothing going on. I assume that many people thought that a parade was happening. Having no information means inviting all interpretations and reactions. There is a magic in running into costuming actions and carnivals unexpectedly. I want to keep this spirit. However, for this exhibition, I am inspired to evoke constructive debates about a specific topic among broad audience members through art. To allow this to happen, presenting just the right amount of guiding information is essential. I am very curious to find out the reactions of the audience to the wearable sculptures and how they perceive them in the exhibition.

Information on the exhibit and dialog partners

The exhibition *MOVING THINGS. On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration* (MatMig, shown at Forum Wissen, Göttingen from October 28th, 2022 until January 15th, 2023), developed from the anthropological MatMig[4] research project, which aims to engage with questions around human-object relations in (forced) migrations from curatorial, anthropological and artistic perspectives. The seven rooms that make up the exhibit involve arrangements without any objects, through a strong focus on individual things, from artistic positions to spatial scenarios. The works of the following artists are also presented here: Mario Badagliacca, Jorge Fernández, Jakob Haueisen, Grey Hutton, Pablo Iraburu, Thaer Maarouf, Gideon Mendel, Adrian Oeser, Yuka Oyama, Pablo Tosco, Clara Wieck.

[1] Neisser, U. (1988). "Five kinds of self knowledge." Philosophical Psychology, 1:1 pp. 35-59. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515088808572924

[2] Oyama.,Y. (2022), 'HELPERS CHANGING HOMES'. https://yukaoyama.com/download-helper-changing-homes/

[3] Garvey, P. (2005). "Domestic Boundaries. Privacy, Visibility and the Norwegian Window." Journal of Material Culture 10(2): 157–176.

[4] For more information on the research project "On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration" visit https://materialitaet-migration.de/en/. This research project has been carried out in collaboration among the following three parties: The Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Göttingen, Museum Friedland, and the Berlin-based exhibition agency *Die Exponauten. Ausstellungen etc.*

Yes, Scholar-Publishers Can Make Common Cause After All

Anne Brackenbury
March, 2023

Last spring, I began work with the open access advocacy group, Libraria, as a Community Convener to help organize a mutual aid network amongst a group of open access publications in anthropology and adjacent fields. Cooperate for Open (or C4O, as this network is affectionately known), is motivated by the idea that there is a wide variety of open access models suitable for different contexts and

scales. In the case of C4O the focus is on small, scholar-led, open access publications that consistently find themselves — sometimes deliberately — on the margins of scholarly publishing. I wrote a piece for *Allegra Lab* about the rationale behind the project when I began this contract, wondering whether (and hoping that) scholar-publishers could make common cause. Now, as my work winds down, it seems as good a time as any to offer my answer to that question.

VALUES-LED PUBLISHING

It's not an easy thing to build a community of practice, especially in this corner of the scholarly publishing community. The open access publications that are the focus of C4O, often referred to as scholar-led, community-driven, and increasingly, Diamond OA, are "labors of love". They are often run on shoestring budgets, relying mostly on voluntary labor and the support of friendly librarians (who sometimes provide ongoing platform and technical assistance) to get by.

> *Small, scholar-led, open access publications consistently find themselves — sometimes deliberately — on the margins of scholarly publishing.*

Many of them face precarious futures. What binds them together, however, is a set of shared values. For instance, they are deeply committed to retaining control over their publications and not handing them over to "professional" publishers. In light of the *HAU* scandal, they are also committed to supporting ethical and fair labor practices. And while they aren't opposed to growing bigger in an organic way, they are often happy to remain small rather than heed the pressure to scale up in order to be taken seriously. In many ways, the long-term goal of this group of publications is not only to put scholarly publishing back into the hands of scholars, but also to challenge the entire process of research assessment with its current focus on prestige and metrics.

These values are what attracted me to the Community Convener position. Who

wouldn't want to support the scholar-publisher David against the commercial publisher Goliath? And so we started to build this community from a place of strength, with a few people who were vocal in their support of scholar-led publishing. We met together over Zoom a few times to reiterate both our shared values and struggles, and then we began to imagine what collective efforts might help ease the burdens we were carrying. We gradually extended the invitation to include other relevant Diamond OA publications, trying to ensure that everyone was on a similar (if not exactly the same) page. We launched a C4O instance on Mattermost (an open source alternative to Slack), so that journal editors could share knowledge directly with one another. We invited experts from funders, infrastructure providers, collective funding experiments, and sister networks like Scholar-led PLUS to address the group. In short, we created the beginnings of a social and communicative infrastructure to make knowledge-sharing easier, and then leveraged it to surface the potential for shared undertakings that could, in turn, cement this new community's identity.

So who exactly is C4O, you might ask? It's a community that currently comprises 35+ individuals representing 26 publications in 8 countries and at least 7 different disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. The most-represented field is anthropology, but we also have publications from science and technology studies, geography, sociology, environmental studies, media studies, and gender studies. Some are the official publications of scholarly societies (e.g., *Cultural Anthropology, Anthropologica*, and *Engaging Science and Technology Studies*). Some are experimental and public-facing (e.g. *Allegra Lab* itself and *Otherwise Magazine*). Others are the product of a more niche vision of scholarly community (e.g., *Made in China*, *Commoning Ethnography*, and *Nature/Culture*), while still others work within a more traditional scholarly journal format.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE?

Have we been successful in building a community of practice? Is it even possible to build a community of practice in six months? Well, if you consider that the feasibility study informing this project indicated that ties between these publications were weak or nonexistent to begin with, then we have most definitely made progress. Nearly 80% of the publications involved reported feeling a sense of connection to a broader community in a recent survey. While this may not yet be as strong an attachment as we would like, it marks a significant change and creates a base for future growth. As a group, we also discussed the landmark Action Plan for Diamond Open Access and agreed to endorse it, recognizing that C4O represents a unique approach to capacity building that others might benefit from.

> *A key goal is to partner with the right organizations so that we increase visibility and discoverability without compromising independence and autonomy.*

One of the goals of this group is to increase the visibility of its members. And there are two ideas that emerged from discussions over the last six months that I hope will form the basis of a next phase of community building. The first, and most compelling, is to use the slow food movement as a model to think about an alternative certification process for small, values-led, Diamond OA publications. While this idea is in its infancy, if it comes to fruition, there is real potential for it to become an important tool for signaling to libraries and funders the value of supporting this kind of publishing. It may also provide a blueprint of sorts for future community mobilization and participation. The second hinges on the development of a shared platform or portal — a way to promote member publications and curate their content for various audiences. This isn't a new idea, of course. Other scholar-led publishing organizations are doing similar things. But

then who wants to reinvent the wheel? A key goal for this group is to partner with the right organizations so that we increase visibility and discoverability without compromising independence and autonomy: what better way than to do so with like-minded champions of a values-led approach to publishing?

These successes — as significant as they are — have been blunted a bit by the challenges faced along the way. Time — one of the most valuable resources in this community — is in especially short supply. Most editors are already overextended publishing their journals, and the idea of getting involved with another collective — even one that could eventually make their lives easier — can feel overwhelming. While all of the editors involved in this community indicated that C4O was an important and valuable initiative, many found it difficult to carve out the time to devote to making it work. Organizing meetings across many different time zones was also a challenge, even with synchronous and asynchronous options. Participation was often uneven and erratic, reflecting the reality of people's very busy lives, and ongoing coordination was required to harness that participation as effectively as possible. Finally, there is a constant war of attrition in the Diamond OA sector. Passion projects emerge one day only to disappear when the scholars who launched them move on to other things. Some struggle to get by financially. Others never really get off the ground or can't meet ongoing publishing schedules. Yet C4O is not only a place to help these more precarious publications survive longer; it may also be an important support in preserving them for future audiences if and when they wind down.

I started this contract as a relative newbie to open access publishing. I have learned a lot, even if much of it — the challenges of tight budgets, labors of love, and limited resources — was already familiar to me as a university press editor. I end this contract feeling both overwhelmed by the challenge ahead, and inspired by this group and their dogged determination to make common cause. Because, despite the challenges involved, this group *has* made common cause with the potential to build even deeper connections in the future. It requires a big vision to turn away from the power of prestige in favor of a more cooperative, collegial, and caring scholarly publishing system. It also requires a lot of hard work. I have

no doubt that if that vision is realized in the future — even just part of it — we will have the supportive and creative minds behind C4O and Libraria to thank for it.

Featured Image: https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1633525 (Gerhard Lipold/Public Domain)

An anthropological chronicle from EASA 2022

Diego Ballestero
March, 2023

I invite you to share in a partial and subjective review of the exhausting academic marathon that was the 17th congress of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA).

After two years of my academic life spent almost entirely in virtuality, I had the opportunity to experience a new city and to see friends outside the small black frames of the computer screen. Although the global health emergency is not over, this congress allowed those who were able to *be there* physically to appreciate the encounter, the shared laughter, the toast with real glasses and the celebration with our peers of the joy of being alive. This raises the question of what the congress brought to those who, for various reasons, had to stay at home. While the hybrid format allowed them to “attend” the various presentations, many encounters take place outside the formal academic context, and thus outside of

Zoom. These spaces contain any congress' greatest potential. There, transnational networks for promising future careers or alliances for the radical transformation of our discipline are built and strengthened. In the future, we must discuss how to make such spaces more inclusive for all, both those who can physically attend and those who cannot.

> *Many encounters take place outside the formal academic context, and thus outside of Zoom.*

Two buses too me from the airport to the hostel located on Fizroy Ave., close to the University and still within my budget. Ever since I started attending congresses, I always liked to rent places outside the city centres, that is, somewhat outside the seats of political and economic power. Such more relegated spaces are in every city despite the capitalist wallpaper and the superficial gloss of individualism; using them as a starting point for exploration, I find, is a way of getting to know the essence of a city and its inhabitants more deeply.

I am aware of the irresponsibility of offering a general impression of Belfast and its inhabitants without having resided there for a long time; my account will be limited to the areas I was able to walk through, from the area of Stranmills University College in the south to Grove Park in the north and the city's Cemetery in the west.

Still close to the Belfast city center, I turned into one of the many streets denied by capitalist opulence; along a scarred road I saw businesses closed due to the negligence and carelessness of an anachronistic political system: A rancid monarchy embedded in the capitalist machine. There, in the open air of that nearly deserted street, I had a beautiful dialogue with a lady. Immediately

noticing my foreign condition, she asked me if I was lost. I replied that I was, but that it didn't matter since I was walking around the city to get to know it. I told her about the EASA conference. She laughed and said it was interesting that people from so many places were coming together in Belfast to discuss things like 'hope'. She then added that the word seemed a thing of the distant past, as the people of Belfast had long been the forgotten margins of the empire. Wise words. Our gazes met in silence. I said goodbye to the woman who was a loyal and imperishable memory, a deep abyss of the past and its spirits.

> *A rancid monarchy embedded in the capitalist machine.*

The complex history of Belfast, condensed in this lady's words, is a metaphor for the deep political, economic and religious division that is embodied, among other things, in a 40-kilometre wall separating two religious communities. The violent times, known as "The Troubles", far from being just another appendix in the history books, still seem to be part of the daily lives of Belfast's inhabitants. This state of perpetual uncertainty about the future and the everlasting pain imposed by coloniality makes me think of Belfast as a Southern hinterland within the UK. It must be remembered that within the Global North there are also Global Souths: peripheral and subordinated spaces in global modernity that constitute places of subaltern resistance.

My quasi-shamanic search for the city’s lost spaces was furthermore stimulated

by my professional situation, which does not even amount to precariousness. Perhaps this is the everyday life of many of those who are reading this article, so I won't be telling you anything new. I can only say that in the German case (I have been living in Berlin for 12 years), the discussions about the need for a change of system – follow them under #IchbinHanna/#IchbinReyhan – are marked by the absence of a solidary, collective, horizontal and intersectional perspective. But that is a discussion for another article.

> *This state of perpetual uncertainty about the future and the everlasting pain imposed by coloniality makes me think of Belfast as a Southern hinterland within the UK.*

In addition to the accommodation costs, I had to pay for transport, food, membership and registration fees. Although some of these costs were covered by the organisers, for which I am very grateful, I had to pay more than 500€ to attend the congress. For many of us this is a lot of money. I know several colleagues whose papers were accepted but who received no funding, not even for on-line participation. Sadly, these colleagues were from countries in the Global South with serious economic problems. I discussed this with some of the conference organisers; their response was that this conference was still cheaper than those run by the American Anthropological Association. I am aware that money, manpower and other resources are required for organising such an event. But that an event is cheaper than that of other associations does not justify an incomplete inclusion policy**.** It is necessary to enable the presence of people with severe economic realities, either with free admissions or symbolic payments either to attend physically or virtually. This would contribute to a multi-diversity of voices. Otherwise, the EASA will continue to be a congress with economically well-off (mostly European) academics talking about issues in parts of the world they don't even live in.

After leaving my backpack at the hostel, I went to the reception party. There I was able, after two years, to meet my friend Erik Petschelies. Between the sound

of the violin and the wood rhythmically struck by the Irish dancers' shoes, we toasted to the consecration of our long work: we were going to coordinate our first panel at EASA. We also had the privilege of being the only panel in the whole congress dedicated to the history of anthropology. We wondered a lot how it was possible that in an event of this magnitude there was only one panel discussing the past of our discipline: because of course, without historical discussions, we run the risk of transforming the present into a crude and dangerous copy of the past, condemning possible futures to a simple retrospective echo.

> *But that an event is cheaper than that of other associations does not justify an incomplete inclusion policy.*

In some of the few panels I was able to attend, I heard similar concerns. It is comforting to know that in dispersed latitudes there are other individuals who risk epistemic disobedience, who commit the blasphemy of not forgetting the memories denied by the official academic canon, who against any common sense of intellectual comfort continue to believe that the search for other worlds is worthwhile. Thus, old colleagues were interwoven with new ones. Long-term utopias were spun with renewed chimeras.

I can say little about the conference as a whole, given its magnitude. But the reflections that emerged in our panel, especially on the colonial continuities in anthropological practice, can be useful for critically examining the everyday work we do. In recent years, the so-called postcolonial perspective, in its Western

version and capitalised by institutions in the global North, was presented as a novel epistemological turn that offered a critical perspective on the state and history of anthropological practices. While it made some progress, it was grounded in global relations of multiple power asymmetries and subordinated to Western narratives. In this sense, I believe it is necessary to delve deeper into what I would like to call chronotopes of coloniality. Promoted by certain sectors of the academic establishment, they articulate and relate at the discursive and material level a narrative analepsis that only perpetuates silence, exclusion and the denial of the pluridiversity of voices.

Another point that ran through the panel was the need to critically investigate the construction, imposition and continuity of the partialised history of the discipline and institutionalised canon. Possibly this will allow us to move away from historiographical reconstructions that celebrate and call to remember the so-called founding "fathers" of anthropology.

> *It is comforting to know that in dispersed latitudes there are other individuals who risk epistemic disobedience.*

Such a critical revision of the discipline's history would also compel a consideration of the geopolitics of coloniality, driven historically by ecclesiastical, economic and political powers. In their institutionalised form, these powers denied the pluridiversity of individuals, but ironically used it for the construction of global racial hierarchies that legitimised the exploitation of those very individuals aggregated into tenuous categories. Our discussions drew attention to the persistence of these geopolitics, so we proposed to conceive and analyse knowledge systems as devices for the dissemination of racial/modern/heteronormative epistemology. In the streets I walked in Belfast, I could see some impacts of these devices of coloniality. There, the abandonment and dismemberment was not only translated into the very materiality of the shattered pavement or the closed shops, but also in the definition of Belfast as a "forgotten margin of empire".

The anachronisms of classical historiography seem to be content with celebrating certain moments or individuals in the history of the discipline (mostly male, white

and from the West). But we believe in the immense potential of the study of the past for the development of tools for political intervention in the present and the construction of a pluridiversity of futures.

Some of the discussions in our panel touched on debates in other panels. However, the most profound reflections took place in the corridors, in the shade of trees or between mugs of beer. Under-appreciated by certain well-heeled academics, these places are still (in my opinion) the real spaces for discussion/construction in any scientific event. It is there that the alliances that will allow the radical transformation of the discipline are built because, as a friend once said, the revolution will not be on-line.

> *Another point to note is the forced inclusion of actors from the Global South by certain individuals and institutions from the Global North.*

In a very generalised way, these bacchanalian reflections deeply questioned the still dangerous and inexplicable continuity of heteronormativities in the postcolonial discourses that (in theory) came to subvert colonialism. Thus, the role of certain people and institutions as active agents in perpetuating the orders of coloniality needs to be interrogated. As we were discussing with a colleague between the first chords of "Dancing Queen", as our glasses were emptying with disturbing speed: there are individuals who are appropriating the counter-narratives of the Global South by institutionalising the decolonial perspective as a dominant paradigm. It is with deep sadness that I must point out that some of these individuals come from the Global South. Possessing vast cultural, economic and symbolic capital (the product of epistemological extractivism from Global South sources), they have become celebrities of the postcolonial canon.


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Another point to note is the forced inclusion of actors from the Global South by certain individuals and institutions from the Global North. This crude attempt of anthropological progressivism is simply a new paint layer for the continuity of the "hidden abode of production", in Marx's words. It is the irrational extraction of living knowledge to be used for the production and academic profit of a minority that will regurgitate it to the Global South as "new decolonial perspective". It is urgent to generate collective and intersectional dialogues that move us away from progressive, liberal, Western, middle (upper) class anthropological discourses that are abysmally separated from the real problems of the oppressed academic majority.

> *May #EASA2024 be a laboratory in its entirety, a device for political and social intervention.*

Unfortunately, this last point appears utopian if we consider the archaic (but still existing) hierarchy of power within EASA. I recognise and welcome the activism of many individuals, both from outside and inside EASA itself, who are fighting endlessly to overcome such hierarchies. But there are still scholars who, despite being at the end of their careers, raise their voices in the face of the threat to their class privileges. At the general assembly, it was demanded that EASA's primary objective (and almost sacrosanct supreme dogma) should be the transformation of anthropology into a scientific discipline. The eternal return of these anachronistic dreams of the old Western modernity must come to an end. I believe that we must aspire to anthropology as a collective praxis in the construction of the pluridiversity of worlds. May #EASA2024 be a laboratory in its entirety, a device for political and social intervention.

> *Barcelona offers a historical space of resistance.*

I am aware of the global health crisis and the economic constraints of a congress

in any format, but there is something about the face-to-face format that deserves to be saved. These two years of social isolation in pursuit of the collective good have made us fragile and susceptible. The constant postponement of our plans, the precariousness of life and the permanent uncertainty were devastating. But we are still alive, and this means to make choices. In this context, face-to-face conferences offer a space where genuine hallway discussions converge, where virtual relationships condense over cups of coffee, where plans for saving anthropology from post-colonial pseudo-progressivism are conceived. Even more importantly, the face-to-face conferences give us the opportunity to meet and dialogue with people like the lady in the street, who shows us the need for anthropological praxis at the service of the grassroots and as a tool for social transformation. I look forward to personally shaking hands with colleagues again in Barcelona. As a city whose freedom was eliminated by Franco's rancid fascism and is still denied by the decrepit monarchy, Barcelona offers a historical space of resistance to transform #EASA2024 into a congress that actively promotes the disappearance of racial, geopolitical and epistemic boundaries of anthropological practices and, in turn, strengthens the bonds of international solidarity.

Your struggle is not a solitary one. In the face of the academic imposition of isolationism as a guarantee of success and promise for the future, let us pursue a collective, anti-/counter-colonial, intersectional and solidarity-based revolution. For some, our struggles may be mere shouts in the wind. But it is precisely this manifestation of the impossible that the academy fears, the demonstration that it is possible to build another way of doing things. Never lose the determination to chase windmills.

Images courtesy of the author.

MOVING THINGS // HELPERS CHANGING HOMES

Yuka Oyama
March, 2023

What roles do things play in the context of forced migration? How do things become a vital source in the constitution of a sense of (new) home? Which promises, emotions, hopes, and expectations do they carry?

The artwork HELPERS CHANGING HOMES (2018), exhibited in MOVING THINGS, On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration (Forum Wissen, Göttingen from October 28th, 2022 until January 15, 2023) is based on a very personal exploration by Berlin-based artist Yuka Oyama about personal possessions in moments of radical uprooting. Working with mobile individuals of various backgrounds and living a nomadic life herself, the artist suggests that for mobile people, after many relocations, material things — more than national identities, culture, ethnic communities, gender roles, tradition(s), etc. — become key, stabile, identity markers. They create a sense of home and, through Yuka's work, find their ways into participatory performance, parades and exhibits.

Yuka Oyama is a visual artist, who employs life-sized wearable sculptures, performance, jewellery, and video to think about what is 'home' for nomadic people. The artist's original training as a jeweller transpires in her fascination for things that are deemed special enough to be carried on the body, as well as thing-person relationship between adorned objects, their wearers, and persons' subjectivities. Yuka's sculptures are often worn in public theatrical settings. They encourage participants to feel more imaginative, experience moments of connection to human and non-human actors, and act beyond set conventions. Since 2019, Yuka is Professor of Craft (Jewellery Art) at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

HELPERS CHANGING HOMES (HCH) (2018) is the first iteration (in a series of three) of Yuka's practice-based artistic research Power of Small Things (2017-ongoing). In this artwork, the artist has collaborated with individuals who have experienced more than thirty transnational and national relocations.

This artwork was produced during Yuka's artist-in-residence in Wellington, New Zealand. To produce HCH, Yuka applied her unique methodology: 1) conducting

qualitative object-based interviews with individuals who had experienced more than thirty relocations; 2) designing costumes for each person that visualized their personal narratives; and 3) undertaking a parade-like performances with the interviewees.

This text records a dialog between two curators of the exhibition MOVING THINGS, On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration, Elza Czarnowski (E) and Friedemann Yi-Neumann (F), and Yuka Oyama (Y). From a conversation about her artwork, we segued into dicussions around 'home' and migration.

E: As a jeweller by training, you have developed close observation into intrinsic relationships – both physical and psychological – between adorning objects/clothing and their wearers, especially how they affect each other. How do adornments participate in creating someone's social identity? In other words, what is the reciprocal physical and psychological affection of adornments and (their) wearers?

I am fascinated with the physical and psychological interrelatedness between adornments, mobile personal possessions, body, and personhood. I draw a reference to one of the five kinds of self-knowledge raised by Ulric Neisser, the 'ecological self'. He describes it as perception of the self in the physical world of one's body, where everything that a person is wearing and which moves with the body such as clothing, jewellery, glasses, prosthetics, etc. is also felt as a part of the corporeal self:

The ecological self is the self as perceived with respect to the physical environment: 'I' am the person here in this place, engaged in this particular activity… In particular, anything that moves with the body tends to be perceived as part of the self…What matters is not possession or contact but agency and co-ordinate movement.[1]

Especially when people go through frequent uprooting, the previous contexts,

who they used to be, seem to become irrelevant in the new context. While possessions can help reiterate, remind us, and hold onto the previous selfhood, especially clothing, they can also instigate the 'otherness' and make differences visible in the new context, since cultures have their own dress codes.

E: You always involve participants in your projects. Could you describe your work process?

Y: When I work on my projects, I usually start from conducting object-based interviews with individuals who have first-hand experience in the topic that I am investigating. For example, this work was about persons who had moved around at least thirty times both domestically and internationally in their lives. The first step was to find the people and conduct interviews. When the interviews ended, I selected seven stories. I then translated them into seven wearable sculptures. I normally try to design the sculpture based on personal narratives with some abstractions, which are my interpretations. In the next step, I invited the interviewees to try out the wearable sculptures. I asked how I should correct forms, scales, and weight distributions. After I added changes and finished the sculptures, I invited them to take part in a performance. We rehearsed for several afternoons. The performance took place in a public space, which I also filmed.

> *For some interviewees, it is the exactness of ambient, the same sound, brightness, physical activities that are facilitated through things that constitute a sense of continuous home.*

E: I have read in some of your notes that your participants have expressed feeling transcendental and free after a performance. Did their participation in your project as a whole feel like a transition for you too? Would you call this a healing process?

Y: Yes, I also felt a kind of transition. But no, this was not intended as an act of

healing like art therapy. This kind of artwork resembles theater, film, and dance productions. It creates a family-like community. Many people contacted me through emails and expressed how this project provided them time to reflect upon uprooting experiences in depth, and how much they were surprised by discovering extended meanings and associations that their personal possessions carried and revealed. For example, many participants responded that specific things make home:

Having a sewing machine defines home. If I am only passing through a city, I cannot have a sewing machine. But when I stay in one place longer, I can have it.

For some interviewees, it is the exactness of ambient, the same sound, brightness, physical activities that are facilitated through things that constitute a sense of continuous home:

The sound of a clock ticking connects many fragmented homes that I have lived in. Does not matter where I am, clocks tick at one constant speed … [The sound] grounds me. It gives an illusion that I am always in the same space.

F: During the HCH parade, you say that some participants felt 'caged' due to the heaviness and design of the sculptures. My thoughts relate to the term cage here. What is the relation between 'capture' and 'captivity' in representing, elaborating or displaying homes?

Y: In HCH, worn sculptures are temporary protections like ephemeral home places, which separate the private sphere from the public. What I emphasized was a shelter-like space like a shell or a façade of a building that replaces individuals' self-representations that hides and makes them anonymous, where they can observe other actors. The home at the same time also 'cages' the wearers/residents. Even though from inside we may disagree and revolt against

histories, heritage, rituals, rules that shape us in this space, the home passes down these integrities in us. Once we leave home it becomes evident what these assets are. As we gradually settle in and don ourselves with a new skin—another home—we incorporate the unfamiliar and new environments on the surface, but at the same time we realize some sort of core elements like rituals, value system, bodily activities, habits, and belief that we carry from previous homes stay intact. Embodied.

F: My question aims more at the different ways that we as artists, scholars etc. can represent homes or home issues and such lived experiences avoiding 'fixation' of differences and providing situated and gradual ones instead. Isn't what curators do in museums partly comparable to making homes?

Y: Your analysis is inspiring. I believe the most direct and effective way of conveying the idea of home transformations and commensal act of home-making in my artwork is to participate in the project. The second most direct way of understanding these aspects in my artwork is through wearing the sculptures. Unfortunately, this cannot be experienced because I got rid of my sculptures. So, in this exhibition, I restage and narrate the past event. By this I wanted to emphasize that even a seemingly stable home is transient.

E: According to your essay on HCH, you mention that: "[t]he notion of home offers qualities such as protection, security, familiarity, love, comfort, and relaxation."[2] But is home really what everyone is looking for? Isn't there another, maybe contrary notion: freeing oneself from spatial and social confinement, newly inventing 'the self' by applying chosen or invented practices vs. 'traditional' or remembered ones?

Y: This work deals with non-geographically-bound-home, where a home-base is

frequently changing. Whether the new environment provides more freedom or confinement depends on the direction of moving/travel, and where you come from. There is privilege in having certain ethnical backgrounds in all directions of transnational relocations. As you say, 'freeing oneself from spatial and social confinement' can be relevant, which results in having little practice in staying long enough at one place.

E: Is privilege also an issue, reflected primarily in the voluntary nature of (mostly financial/work) mobility? To what extent have you learned that things become helpful and relevant to other causes of migration, especially in flight and displacement contexts during the research?

Y: Privilege is certainly an issue, but disorientation and reorientation are commonly experienced in diaspora. I have been examining different causes of nomadism such as numerous transnational/national relocations, long-distance vocational commutes, and children who are raised in shared-parenting parallel homes. What I have been learning is inventions of individual methods to prompt ongoingness. I think these methods are transferable to various reasons for migrations, especially flight and displacement.

F: Apropos ongoingness, do you consider home something that can be brought over?

Y: Do you mean bringing people over through objects that are props and prompts to stage home?

F: No, I meant bringing over what can be used to make home but also home as a scientific or artistic object. There is a distinction between the transformative objects of your work and the artistic material transformation of 'the object', for example, the sewing machine. Your transformed objects cross private and public realms, you negotiate intimate home issues across different spheres and boundaries. Going back to our previous discussion about parallels between home-

making and exhibition-making: in homes, these boundaries might be intimacies, while in museums the showcase's glass protects things. As home researchers, you and I might have different ways of working on and presenting homes and correlates, but we might negotiate similar issues of in/visibility, dis/closure and presentation.

Y: You raise a very remarkable observation and comparison – glass vitrines, homes (buildings), and museums; in/visibility, dis/closure, and anonymity. Showing something very private in public space through custom-made worn sculptures is what I try to do with my artwork.

> *Whether the new environment provides more freedom or confinement depends on the direction of moving/travel, and where you come from.*

E: The security conferred by a glass case and feeling secure at home might be similar, but differences arise at several levels, too. The vitrine can be seen as a safe space, but safety from what and for whom?

F: There are social and cultural differences about visibilities and invisibilities and the boundaries of home. As Pauline Garvey[3] has shown in her work on different communities and home boundaries in Norway, dissimilar homes have different forms of keeping and maintaining intimacy. Don't you think that it is also necessary to reflect on the boundaries and constraints of museums in similar ways? The showcase might be considered a safe space for the exhibit or an unnecessary barrier preventing interaction, depending on the point of view.

Y: As you mention, the critical difference between the two spaces, a private home (that is neither a temporary shelter nor institutionally created space) and a museum, is how people inhabit the space. In the museum space there might be no sense of ownership unless one is the owner of a private museum. Similar parallels can be drawn to IKEA showrooms or model showrooms of real-estate, where mess and personal traces that come from habituating the space are hidden and controlled.

F: This is an interesting point. I don't think there is no sense of ownership regarding Museums. The ownership of museum objects is currently heavily contested in the face of colonial violence and dispossessions. Might it be that you are rather referring to the difference between formal ownership and inhabitation?

Y: Yes. Inhabitation. What I mean is traces of living. A space that allows dwelling as well as storing and bringing in any items necessarily for homing without negotiations. Rooms that contain or have reminiscence of smell, sound, orderliness, and chaos—evidence that someone or some people have spent time to settle in. Do you anticipate visitors staying for long and returning – making themselves at home?

E: We would very much like to expand the space to include more than the classic museum functions. Several steps have been made in this direction: the free entry policy, but perhaps more importantly an education program, which offers dialogical exhibition tours in several languages. Visitors are, for example, encouraged to sit down at a canteen table and listen to different stories around the topic of food. Of course, there is still a long way to go in opening museums to all.

F: The visitor's view is something I would like to ask you about. Do you know how the audience has in the past understood and interpreted the wearable sculptures?

Y: At the site of performance, where no information was provided, people did not take any notice of the performance. They just walked by as if there was nothing going on. I assume that many people thought that a parade was happening. Having no information means inviting all interpretations and reactions. There is a magic in running into costuming actions and carnivals unexpectedly. I want to keep this spirit. However, for this exhibition, I am inspired to evoke constructive debates about a specific topic among broad audience members through art. To allow this to happen, presenting just the right amount of guiding information is essential. I am very curious to find out the reactions of the audience to the wearable sculptures and how they perceive them in the exhibition.

Information on the exhibit and dialog partners

The exhibition *MOVING THINGS. On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration* (MatMig, shown at Forum Wissen, Göttingen from October 28th, 2022 until January 15th, 2023), developed from the anthropological MatMig[4] research project, which aims to engage with questions around human-object relations in (forced) migrations from curatorial, anthropological and artistic perspectives. The seven rooms that make up the exhibit involve arrangements without any objects, through a strong focus on individual things, from artistic positions to spatial scenarios. The works of the following artists are also presented here: Mario Badagliacca, Jorge Fernández, Jakob Haueisen, Grey Hutton, Pablo Iraburu, Thaer Maarouf, Gideon Mendel, Adrian Oeser, Yuka Oyama, Pablo Tosco, Clara Wieck.

[1] Neisser, U. (1988). "Five kinds of self knowledge." Philosophical Psychology, 1:1 pp. 35-59. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515088808572924

[2] Oyama.,Y. (2022), 'HELPERS CHANGING HOMES'. https://yukaoyama.com/download-helper-changing-homes/

[3] Garvey, P. (2005). "Domestic Boundaries. Privacy, Visibility and the Norwegian Window." Journal of Material Culture 10(2): 157–176.

[4] For more information on the research project "On the Materiality of (Forced) Migration" visit https://materialitaet-migration.de/en/. This research project has been carried out in collaboration among the following three parties: The Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Göttingen, Museum Friedland, and the Berlin-based exhibition agency *Die Exponauten. Ausstellungen etc.*

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