# SUOMEN ANTROPOLOGI: JOURNAL OF THE FINNISH ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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# EDITORS' NOTE:
# ACTIVIST ANTHROPOLOGY, PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, AND INVASIVE SPECIES

Once more, we are thrilled to announce the release of a fresh edition of S*uomen antropologi: The Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society*. Since the last issue, there has been no changes in the journal's processes or editorial team. A noteworthy piece of news is that our editorial secretary Saara Toukolehto successfully defended her thesis (2023) on immigrant integration and its paradoxes in Berlin at the University of Groningen in June. Our heartfelt congratulations to Saara from the whole editorial team. We are delighted that Saara continues to work with us at the journal and emphasize that along with defending her thesis, she also copy-edited this issue.

Since the publication of the previous issue, in addition to our regular tasks reviewing manuscripts and editing, we have dedicated substantial effort to the housekeeping and maintenance of the journal. Our aim is that after two issues, sometime next year, after having completed a full term, we could step down as editors-in-chief and give way to others. To make the transition as easy as possible, we have continued to develop and document the publication processes of our journal so that new people can easily join the team and that there would be as little 'silent knowledge' vested in us and other members of the editorial team as possible. For a large part this work consists of very mundane things, such as writing instructions on the use of the publication software, on the workflows of editors and thinking of ways of reducing administrative work.

This issue of *Suomen antropologi* is a normal issue, which consists of individual article and research report submissions sent to us. Once again, by fortunate happenstance, the various articles, research reports and essays discuss related topics, lending the issue a sense of internal coherence. This issue consists of articles by Ville Laakkonen (Tampere University), Timothy Anderson (University of Tallinn) and Jacob Seagrave, who examine migrant disappearances, migrant detention and climate activism respectively. In the research reports are three *lectio præcursoria*, namely short lectures read by a PhD candidate in the beginning of their public thesis defense. In her lectio, Lidia Gripenberg discusses her research among Finnish Roma and Bulgarian Roma immigrants. Victoria Peemot (University of Helsinki) presents in her lectio her research on human–horse relations in Southern Tyva, and Pilvi Posio (University of Turku) presents her dissertation on the

sense of community and long-term disaster recovery in East Japan. In his essay, Thorgeir Kolshus (University of Oslo) reflects on public anthropology in Norway and Heikki Wilenius reports on the conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society in Rovaniemi in March 2023. Finally, we have three book reviews by Elina Hytönen-Ng (University of Eastern Finland), Samuli Lähteenaho (University of Helsinki) and Anna Varfolomeeva (University of Helsinki).

## ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

Ville Laakkonen's opening article examines the death and disappearances of migrants in the southeastern borderlands of the European Union, namely in Greece on the island of Lesvos and in the Evros region. Laakkonen shows that the border violence of the European Union does not only cause the death of migrants from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, but border violence continues after their deaths. The disappearances, the non-identification of dead bodies and the denying of proper mourning to relatives and close ones are, according to Laakkonen, the continuation of border violence by other means as the very existence and equal humanity of migrants is denied even after death. Laakkonen conceptualizes this violence as *forensic bordering*: while forensic sciences seek to provide answers and even accountability, forensic bordering with the active non-identification of dead bodies does exactly the opposite. It classifies the dead migrants as *Agnostoi*, the unidentified, denies answers and ultimately rejects accountability of the violence that happens on our borders.

While Laakkonen examines the deaths and disappearances of migrants in the borderlands, Timothy Anderson follows what happens to migrants who reach the European Union, but who are detained in detention centers. As Anderson discusses in his article on an Estonian detention center, the detention of migrants is presented officially as an administrative procedure needed to enforce immigration laws and to process 'irregular' immigrants. However, it is often experienced by detainees as a punitive practice. This disjuncture made detention disorienting, uncanny and insulting for the detainees—Anderson's interlocutors. And as Anderson shows, the 'punitive protection' of detention has often very real negative effects on the health and well-being of the migrants. On the face of it, detention seems like a form of border violence based very much on its limbo-like character; on the very liminality to which some migrants are subjects when living and similar to the forensic liminality other migrants are subjected to in death— as described by Laakkonen. Anderson however rightly stresses that the

detainees do not lose their agency and confront the detention regime in different ways and with different means available to them.

Laakkonen and Anderson approach these questions as both scholars and activists working to assist migrants. In line with the ethos of 'activist anthropology', this obviously does not mean that political aims override scholarly rigor, but that scholarly rigor is employed as a means to advance political objectives. In this case, countering border violence by documenting forms of bordering practices that often are hidden in plain sight from the citizens of the EU. The topics of Laakkonen's and Anderson's research are grim, but we feel such 'dark anthropology' (Ortner 2016) is needed for as long as there is darkness.

This issue's third article moves from activist anthropology to the anthropology of activists. In his article, Jacob Seagrave analyses the social movement Extinction Rebellion (XR) based on an ethnographic fieldwork in England. Seagrave argues that within XR, there is a project of forming a new kind of subjectivity, where the emotion of grief is a central motivating force for the activists. This, he contends, is in a marked contrast with the disruptive and extremist public image of the movement. According to Seagrave, XR is fundamentally anti-political, by putting the duty to truth and earth before political goals. This new kind of political subjectivity is an example of the social changes brought by climate change.

Lidia Gripenberg's *lectio* comes back to the theme of migration. Gripenberg summarizes the core arguments of her thesis based on ethnographic research in 2014–2015 in Finland on how Finnish Kale assisted fellow Roma who had moved to Finland from Romania and Bulgaria. This was a time when migration was a particularly 'hot' topic in Finnish public discourse, as migration was on the one hand seen as needed to ensure labor in an aging population, while on the other hand the arrival of asylum seekers—as well as migration in general—was met also by an anti-immigrant discourse, practices and outright racism. The Roma from Eastern Europe were however citizens of the EU and formed an 'invisible' group of migrants to whom Finland officially had practically no responsibilities. Gripenberg discusses how the Finnish Kale, both privately and through associations, helped the Roma from Eastern Europe, what mutual relations they forged, how migration of Roma was conceptualized amid the larger discussion on migration as well as how both Finnish and East European Roma conceptualized themselves and others in terms of various and shifting identities.

Relations are the focus of Victoria Peemot's *lectio*, which presents her thesis on the mutual becoming of the relations between Tyvan horsemen,

their horses and their relations to the land. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Tyva and Mongolia, Peemot discusses *čer törel*, a Tyvan expression, which can be translated as 'land-based kinship', relations based on being born or belonging to the land. This relation does not encompass only humans, but also nonhuman animals and particularly horses. Peemot's thesis focuses on the rich and generative human–horse relations in Tyva, and how horses create and mediate relations between people, animals and the land in Tyva—and beyond, as Peemot's discussion of her Helsinki-born daughter's horse in Tyva shows.

Pilvi Posio's *lectio* on her thesis on community responses to disasters and returning (or not returning) home following the earthquake and tsunami of 2014 in East Japan shares common themes with the research articles and reports of this issue As Posio notes, the earthquake and subsequent tsunami, as well as the following disaster at the nuclear power plant at Fukushima, left over 470 000 people internally displaced. They were permanently or temporarily evacuated or relocated, and their homes destroyed or significantly damaged. Posio examines the varying conceptions and temporalities of the concept of 'community' in the responses to disaster, especially among those who chose to return. Posio focuses particularly on the futures, both imagined and actively constructed, enacted through community-making.

## PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY AND 'HORRIBLE HYBRIDS'

Thorgeir Kolshus, in his essay, ponders on the contemporary role of anthropologists as public intellectuals. He posits that public anthropology is making a new comeback, offers Norwegian anthropology as a model for how anthropologists should engage with the public, and, moreover, contends that these encounters with the public helps anthropologists identify their own biases and provide sources of fresh analytical thinking. Kolshus also expresses scepticism towards recent developments in the anthropological conceptual apparatus regarding 'notions of privilege and victimhood', asserting that since their genealogy points to social scientific thinking in the United States, they are ill-equipped for analysis elsewhere.

His example of this is 'white flight', which, according to his anecdote, was demanded by a reviewer to be used in an analysis of inner-city change in Norway, even though the social change depicted in the article did not involve ethnic Norwegians, but, instead, wealthy immigrants. Thorgeir's point is that the alleged hegemony of these kinds of concepts undermines

the authority of anthropologists in Norway, and, consequently, elsewhere outside the United States, since analysis that is based on wrong kinds of concepts is not legible or credible to the public.

This essay underwent a standard review process for essays and research reports in *Suomen antropologi*. That means that instead of a double-blind peer review, they are reviewed by members of the editorial staff and sometimes sent for additional comments by an expert on the topic. During the review process, we pointed to Kolshus that to us, the case described in the essay was not about concepts originating from the United States colonizing European anthropology, but simply an instance of a bad scientific review. He nevertheless insisted leaving this point in the essay 'for the reader to ponder'. So, in the end, we mutually agreed that the essay stays as it is, but we express our dissenting view in this editorial note.

In the light of our disciplinary history, and the history of social sciences in general, concepts have always travelled. Sometimes the result might resemble the kind of 'conceptual override' that Kolshus writes about. He accuses US-based Mertonian middle-range theories taking over European anthropology, but we wouldn't have them in the first place, if Talcott Parsons hadn't translated Max Weber for the US audience, influencing, in turn, Robert Merton's idea of social analysis.

Was Parsons, while applying Weber's thinking for contemporary political analysis (Parsons 1942), 'conceptually overriding' the social reality of the United States? Or, to bring up an example closer to home: African kinship studies influenced anthropological thinking about kinship considerably, but also created a lot of rather convoluted research, when anthropologists tried to apply the concept of unilineal descent to the social reality of their fieldwork locations, which wasn't possible without considerable conceptual violence. The history of anthropology is full of this kind of cross-pollination; sometimes it is wildly successful, sometimes, in hindsight at least, it is underwhelmingly mediocre.

Each and every anthropological concept has their roots in a certain empirical context or contexts. Sometimes these travel well, sometimes less so. But if a reviewer insists on using a concept that does not make sense, well, let's say we don't agree that it can be taken as a leitmotif of contemporary anthropology. But if Kolshus's Zeitdiagnose resonates with your experiences in academic publishing, we more than welcome letters to the editor on the topic.

An interesting correspondence to Kolshus's argument is in the conference report, also in this issue, from the biennial conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society, held in Rovaniemi in March this year.

Heikki Wilenius reports on an exchange that took place in the roundtable session of the conference, about what kinds of concepts the discipline needs. Marilyn Strathern expressed the view that, roughly speaking, aligns with Kolshus's thoughts about concepts limiting our understanding. However, as an antidote, Strathern argued the discipline needs 'horrible hybrids': concepts that break through our established patterns of thinking. In the same discussion Tim Ingold expressed his strong dislike of the concept of intersectionality, complaining that anthropologists are 'clumsy' in using words, 'without thinking about what they really mean', which could be read as a veiled critique along the same lines as Kolshus's 'conceptual override'. But, made in a conference, where a lot of inspiring intersectional research was presented, the remark sounded out of place, and perhaps a bit outdated too. Piers Vibetsky, when questioned from the audience about the optics of an all-Cambridge representation on the roundtable stage, quipped that 'everyone else is welcome to become their own invasive species'. Based on the weak signals in the conference panels, perhaps the intersectional invasion has already begun.

TUOMAS TAMMISTO & HEIKKI WILENIUS
Editors-in-Chief

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*Ville Laakkonen*

# *ÁGNOSTOI:* GREECE AND THE FORENSIC BORDERING OF FORTRESS EUROPE

### ABSTRACT

This article explores migrant disappearances and border deaths at the Greek borderlands through the notion of forensic bordering. Based on fieldwork in the Evros region, Athens and its surroundings, and on the island of Lesvos, I argue that disappearance and non-identification in the event of death are effectively border violence by other means. Three forms of symbolic and political post-mortem border violence are then explicated: the act of disappearance, the act of non-identification, and the act of denying proper mourning. Crucially, this article unpacks the underlining logic that, if migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East are not supposed to cross the border in the first place, their existence and, ultimately, their equal humanity can be similarly denied in death. If the forensic sciences are generally perceived positively as means to provide answers, closure, accountability, and truth, forensic bordering seeks to do the exact opposite, rejecting accountability and employing silence as a deterrence.

Keywords: disappearances, border violence, European Union, forensics, Greece, migration

## INTRODUCTION

> 'I thank Greece for being our European *ασπίδα [Aspida, "shield"]* in these times.'
> – Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission

Some of the dead among us are meant to be seen. They are remembered in speeches, sometimes even revered. Graves are often the concrete sites of honouring and remembering, invested with personal—and sometimes cultural and political—significance. They also stand as an affirmation that the deceased has, indeed, left the realm of the living; treated with respect, and sent off according to socially and culturally accepted rituals. Some graves acquire a specific role in how we perceive, write, represent, and reproduce history; sites such as the graves of the 'Unknown Soldier' around the world have no name but serve the purpose of consolidating a particular national narrative and social memory. Others are an extension of the influence a person carried in their life: The Street of Tombs in the ruins of Kerameikos dates back to third and fourth centuries BC and consists of the graves of notables from ancient Athens. Their monuments—statues, pillars, and gravestones—are intended to reflect their societal position and wealth, to be seen and marvelled at. Their affluence and standing have allowed them to be embedded into the very

historical and cultural fabric of ancient Greece; thousands of years later, they, too, represent what for the dominant European intellectual narrative is crucially the home of philosophy, the arts, and the sciences. There is a heightened sense of visibility in such graves, and the past they stand for, as with the graves of the 'notables' of our time, from intellectuals to politicians, artists and athletes to royalty.

However, not all dead are afforded similar levels of visibility. Not all dead are allowed to leave the realm of the living or afforded the customary ritual attention and respect. This article looks at the bodies that, as a continuation of their *disappearability* (Laakkonen 2022) in life, remain invisible in death; unnamed, unidentified, and more often than not, uncared for; namely, migrants[1] who have died at the Greek borderlands. In the best tradition of the Greek dramas of antiquity, there is a particular irony in the fact that while some stay with us through millennia—like the Athenian notables lining the Street of Tombs—others are all but stripped of their social and political life, even their name, upon their death. They are the άγνωστοι (*ágnostoi*, 'unknown', singular άγνωστος, *ágnostos*). If we take as our starting point Robert Hertz's (1960: 27) notion that there is a moral obligation to care for the dead, which sets human bodies apart from animal carcasses, then we can argue that there are, indeed, groups of humans who do not seem to count as proper humans. In this case, the disappeared migrants, or their unknown bodies, the unwelcome, the reviled, and the despised, do not seem to be afforded the care which would qualify them as equal human beings.[2]

My arrival to migrant disappearances was the entwining of two different paths: one interested it marginalisation and violence from an academic perspective, the other being a grass-roots migrants' rights activist. Beginning in 2018 and doing the majority of my fieldwork between the summer of 2019 and spring of 2020, I travelled around and along the Greek borderlands in the Evros region and Athens as well on the island of Lesvos. Seeking to draw a 'map' of sorts of migrant disappearances and border deaths, among other things I spent time with and talked to local residents, migrants at various stages of their journeys, staff from different international humanitarian organisations, and forensic professionals. These discussions often took place on the condition of anonymity or involved individuals in precarious situations. Thus, in this article I have intentionally included only as little identifying contextual information as is necessary for such excerpts to be intelligible.

I also joined a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) receiving border crossers in the Aegean, photographed and collected items left behind on the 'migrant trail' (De León and Wells 2015), and mapped cemeteries. I looked at the news reports of so-called 'migrant fatalities' and compared them to the available statistics. In Greece, and during follow-up inquiries carried out online, I encountered numerous unknown bodies and names looking for a body, but also missing files, mistaken identities, and institutional negligence building up to what, following Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, and Surindar Dhesi (2017: 1269), could be called violent inaction. But, here, this violent inaction was directed not at the living, but the dead—or those liminally somewhere in between.

Due to the nature of my research interest, that is, disappearances, I often dealt with the aftermath of the event rather than its emergence since as I tried piecing together the context in which those unknown bodies and names lacking a body (Laakkonen 2023) existed, employing a 'negative methodology', also looking at what was not there (Laakkonen 2023; Navarro 2020).

This included learning about the procedures and practices involved in investigating and identifying the dead—or about the failures and shortcomings of said procedures and practices. Equally, it involved learning to not only document but to 'listen' to the material remains left behind: torn dinghies, empty water bottles, and life jackets unfit for seafaring lying on the beaches; backpacks, shoes, babies' dummies, and packets of medicine left along the railway tracks. This ethnographic context-building, augmented by learning from and with living humans— such as the forensic professionals, refugees and migrants, activists, and locals—is concerned with investing these material remains with a sense of humanity (Laakkonen 2023), the very quality border violence in its many forms[3] seeks to deny. These physical remains and residues tell of violence, displacement, and movement, and they tell of journeys.

In this article, building on my research, I am concerned with the tension essentially engendered by a struggle over humanity; how migrant bodies are human and, through forensic neglect, not-human at the same time. To unpack this tension, I explore how the presumed moral obligation to care for the dead is suspended, and show how borders, and the concomitant border violence, is imprinted and inflicted on the dead and the unknown as they are inflicted on living border-crossers. If 'forensics', broadly speaking, refers to the techniques and technologies employed to establish what happened, when, to whom, and by whom in the aftermath of, for example, an accident or a crime, then the practices that I analyse here do the exact opposite. These practices coalesce into what I call the forensic bordering of Fortress Europe, that is, a deliberate forensic silence and negligence in the aftermath of death and disappearance.

With forensic bordering, I draw from, and somewhat expand, the research and debates on bordering and bordering practices which have flourished in anthropology and other social sciences during the past twenty years. According to Henk van Houtum and Ton van Naerssen (2002: 126), 'borders do not represent a fixed point in space or time, rather they symbolise a social practice of spatial differentation'. To account for these differentations, they focus on *bordering* practices: borders 'represent an implicit, often taken for granted, agreement among the majority of people' (ibid.). In other words, a border is 'thus much more than a protection wall alone. It is a means of saying, representing, glorifying, or resisting a *here*, a *we* and a *them*' (Van Houtum 2021: 36, emphasis original). In short, border is not a noun but a verb (ibid.): bordering is what people do to realise and demarcate the border they perceive— or wish—to be there. It also includes practices which mark who and what *does not belong* to the bounded space, in this case, migrants looking for refuge and safety inside the European Union.

The notion of 'bordering' has been taken up by various scholars (see e.g. De Genova 2017; Kingsolver 2023; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Tervonen, Pellander, and Yuval-Davies 2018) to draw attention to various acts which constitute the border in everyday life, often to deter and/or brutalise those not deemed worthy of crossing the borders. These are people who do not 'know their place' in urban spaces, a geographical ordering of nation states, or (post/neo)colonial hierarchies, and includes the poor, the minorities, and the migrants. This often happens through the ways spaces are divided and segregated— 'hostile architectures' (Petty 2016) such as spikes preventing people from sleeping on the street are but one example—through a myriad of forms of paperwork and legislation, or—in

the case of police and the military—through the license to violence granted to them by the state. The practices I am concerned with in this article, those I have chosen to call forensic bordering, are closely aligned with paperwork, legislation, and state violence, but sometimes involve spatial planning as well, from cemetery maps to detention and camp sites. In *Forensic Architecture* (2017), Eyal Weizman (2017: 27–29) notes how the resolution of publicly available satellite images is not determined by technology, but by legal regulations and fixed at a pixel size where a human body is indistinguishable from the landscape. Similarly, forensic bordering is not just directed at the bodies and disappeared persons. Instead, it is also an attempt to regulate what can be known of migrant border deaths and disappearances along the European Union's borders.

Henk van Houtum and Rodrigo Bueno Lacy (2020) have broken down the European Union's border regime into three bordering mechanisms: the 'pre-borders' of visa documents and bureaucracy which control mobility from afar, the actual surveilled and enforced borders regulating mobility on the spot, and the 'post-borders' of camps and detention centres. Forensic bordering in Greece, in turn, is seamlessly folded into all three mechanisms, but simultaneously operates in a space of its own. As a kind of 'post-post-borders', it looks both backward and forward. On the one hand, forensic bordering is about concealment, as well as about marking bodies—or names without a body—as unwanted, someone who does not belong in Greece. On the other hand, as I have argued elsewhere (Laakkonen 2022) disappearances are cynically intended as a deterrent to would-be border-crossers.

I argue there are three primary forms of political and symbolic violence enacted on the disappeared and their bodies, through 1) the act

of disappearance, 2) the act of non-identification, and 3) the act of denying proper mourning. The first half of this article lays the groundwork for a more detailed discussion of forensic bordering. I begin by defining migrant disappearances and border deaths and then proceed with an overview of Greece as the backdrop against which those disappearances and border deaths take place. In the second half of this article, I explore in more detail forensic bordering through two distinct examples, identification processes and burial practices.

## DISAPPEARANCES, BORDERS, AND BORDERING

The first form of violence enacted on migrant bodies is the disappearance itself. When discussing migrant disappearances and border deaths, it is important to delineate what kind of disappearances fall within the purview of what such terms seek to understand. There are two important dimensions to making this definition: first of all, I am concerned with migrant disappearances alone, not every kind of disappearance, and, second, my interests lie in those who either disappear from their family and loved ones while crossing to Greece and the European Union or those—often undocumented—migrants who end up dead in one of Greece's morgues. Of course, people other than migrants also disappear, but they do not encounter and live with the disappearability brought about by a 'globalised militarised apartheid' (Besteman 2019; see also Kalir 2019; Van Houtum 2010); a hierarchy of mobility and the xenophobic and violent border regime enforcing that hierarchy which is set up—or financed—by states and entities such as the European Union, the United States, or Australia to protect that inequality. The migrants who disappear do so while looking for places to cross

clandestinely, to avoid being pushed back by the border police or the military. Or they do so after a crossing, deep within Greek territory, but in an equally dangerous and marginalised position.

Border deaths as a category are intimately connected to migrant disappearances. This is because a majority of those who die while crossing to Greece—or elsewhere in the Mediterranean—also remain unidentified (see, for example, Last 2015; Pavlidis and Karakasi 2019: 467). Therefore, any initiative aimed at talking about migrant disappearances also prompts us to talk about border deaths. Disappearances and border deaths are also linked on an emotional level, because, as Laura Huttunen (2016: 202) has argued, disappearances engender a sense of liminality: given the context—genocide in Bosnia in Huttunen's case, here life-risking border crossings—the probability of death is obvious but, simultaneously, the disappearance prevents those left behind from moving on emotionally, socially, and symbolically. There is always a possibility, no matter how unrealistic or improbable, that their loved ones are still alive. The possibly deceased cannot then necessarily be reincorporated—through the burial of the body and/or associated acts of mourning—to the community.

Bordering is a useful concept for our thinking here, because borders, or the act of crossing, should not be perceived merely as something instantiated at lines drawn on maps, at—mostly—internationally recognised borders. Instead, as research on borders has highlighted (e.g. De Genova 2017; Demetriou and Dimova 2018; Green 2013; see also Laakkonen 2020), borders are processes and practices enacted and challenged. They are acted on, enforced, and reconstituted through social and political choices and actions, and they are continuously formed and reformed. Borders are not enforced

and demarcated in practice merely through the 'spectacular' (Andersson 2014: 138–139), but also through the hidden and silent; in my research this included the nooks and crannies of everyday governance: morgues, cemeteries, and classified files. Furthermore, just as, for example, passport controls, visa regimes, detention, and police raids do not stop at the borders drawn on the map, neither do border deaths take place there alone. Many of the border deaths I encountered while comparing statistics, collecting news, or talking to forensic professionals or witnesses did, in fact, take place well within the Greek side of the border, such as in abandoned buildings because of hypothermia, in road accidents after police chases, or as people were hit by a passing train while travelling along railway tracks.

If border deaths do not happen strictly speaking at the officially recognised borders, and borders do not reside only where they are drawn, then it logically follows that neither do the disappearances of migrants. As long as people on the move must travel clandestinely to avoid authorities or have no chance of settling and formalising their residence, they are disappearable. The exact time of disappearance is also relative, unless there are witnesses to incidents such as a shipwreck, of course. Does that disappearance take place, in the case of a body, at the presumed or medically determined time of death or when a body cannot be identified? Or is it when someone starts looking for their family member or a loved one they have not heard from in weeks, maybe months? This dilemma, and the way it is subsumed by forensic bordering, further *dislocates* the border—and the disappearance. It is because of this that subject of research into disappearances and border deaths must, to borrow from Ghassan Hage (2005: 466), be treated as a single, but geographically noncontiguous, site; it is not simply constituted

by various sites which are connected, but a site revealing itself differently at different locations (see also Parent 2022: 21). At heart, this site has a simple message to border-crossers from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East: you are disappearable.

## GREECE—AT AND FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION'S BORDERS

Before moving on to a more elaborate discussion of forensic bordering it is important to explore Greece as one crucial site of such practices. The country has occupied a very particular—and tense—position both geographically and in European imaginaries: 'neither exotic nor wholly familiar', as Michael Herzfeld (1987: 7) famously observed when critiquing anthropologists' attempts to define the Mediterranean as a region. Ernestine Friedl (1962: 5) described this sensation of familiarity and strangeness in her classic village study by showing her own surprise at how shoes familiar to North Americans, men's oxfords and women's slippers, were used in completely different ways in rural Greece. Moreover, John Davis (1977: 7; cf. Bossevain 1979) noted how 'mediterraneanists [sic] do not undergo a complete cultural disorientation such as those who work in sub-Saharan Africa or New Guinea sometimes claim to have experienced and benefited from' but, simultaneously, suffered from a 'desire to be as primitive as every other colleague'.

Even if anthropological critiques (e.g. Herzfeld 2005; Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot and Silverstein 2022) of such perceptions are now common, in popular debates and the media they continue to flourish. Greece is perceived as the border between Europe and the Eastern non-Europe, outlandish in itself, excluded in its very inclusion. On the one hand, Greece is perceived as a bulwark against the non-European—essentially non-white— 'other', or, a 'shield' as Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, put it (European Commission 2020). On the other hand, by its proximity to the 'other', Greece has often been perceived with exoticising marvel or, at times, orientalist neo-colonialism (Cabot 2019: 262). In the context of migration, Greece is, in European imaginaries, made non-European by the presence of the very people it is expected to keep out. It is 'contaminated' by the presence and heightened visibility of the border—and, indeed, the non-white and non-European people outside the border that the European Union and Greece are both enforcing and fortifying.

Greek public has, of course, a markedly different reading of the situation. The financial crash and the subsequent harsh austerity policies overseen by the European 'Troika'—the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund— ravaged the country economically and enforced a sense of being colonised (Knight 2017), as well as anger towards foreign powers stripping Greece of what once was (Theodossopoulos 2014). Following a significant increase in border crossings from Turkey, Greece, and specifically its Aegean islands, was made into a de facto containment zone for migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, especially through the European Union's strategy of hotspots (Spathopoulou and Carastathis 2020; Vradis et al. 2018). In such an atmosphere of indignation and humiliation, migrants are easily interpreted as a continuation of the very same foreign dominance eating away at Greece's economic possibilities. My research participant Christos, a man in his late 40s working at a corner shop in a town in Northern Greece near the border, was one of the locals who felt disdain for migrants. He explained, 'How should I say this?

I mean of course there are people who need help. But how many guests can you welcome to your house? They're not us, they're Muslims. There's a limit. And Erdogăn [the President of Turkey] keeps sending more and more of them.'[4] It follows that in a mix of frustration, xenophobia, and a desire to manifest Greece's Europeanness, increasingly violent border enforcement is readily embraced.[5] Not content with being just the 'shield', the Greek border police and military intend to also be the 'spear' at the battlements of Fortress Europe.

Border violence in Greece is not, of course, a sole incident. Pushbacks, where border-crossers are forced—often violently or with the threat of violence—back inside the borders of the country from whence they crossed, are commonplace along the European Union's borders (Border Violence Monitoring Network 2023a; Christides et al 2021a; 2021b; see also Push-Back Map 2023). Equally common are pullbacks, where the police or military of the country migrants are leaving from intercept and capture the would-be border-crossers at the border and force them back. Perhaps the most well-known cases of pullbacks take place on the sea route beginning from Libya, where the so-called Libyan Coast Guard cooperates with Frontex and European Union members' militaries to intercept and forcibly return migrants to Libya (see e.g. Sanderson 2022; Statewatch 2020a). However, the Turkish Coast Guard are also known to stop migrants headed for Greece (see e.g. Sarobmed 2018; Statewatch 2020b) both in the Aegean and at the Evros border. What pushbacks and related border violence do is force migrants into increasingly dangerous routes and greater risk-taking in a bid to cross onto the European Union's soil. This, augmented by an increase in the criminalisation of civilian search and rescue operations and general humanitarian work with migrants (see

e.g. Amnesty 2020; Gionco and Kanics 2022), in turn, leads to more deaths and disappearances. Indifferent, negligent, or even hostile forensic attention seamlessly continues this logic and practice of border violence.

It is also worth noting that border violence in its myriad forms, the pushbacks and pullbacks, the beatings and abuse, the capture and detention, is only the boots on the ground. In the grand scheme of things, what lies behind the violence is of course the European Union's migration policies and visa regime, what Van Houtum (2021: 35) calls 'paper walls'. It is simply extremely difficult for African, Asian, and Middle Eastern nationals, at least those without particular means such as wealth, to gain legal entry to the European Union. This makes clandestine means of travel, hiding in the woods, and crossing the sea in dinghies at night the only viable options for people on the move searching for refuge and safety inside the European Union. This has also led to the proliferation of the use of the category of 'illegal immigrant', and the assumption that individuals seeking to enter the European Union—and Europe more broadly—from the aforementioned parts of the world for any other reason than tourism or business will be deemed illegal and treated accordingly, usually with no questions asked. Fortress Europe rests on a solid diplomatic, economic, political, and legal foundation nurtured over recent decades, since the establishment of the Schengen Area in 1985 and the European Single Market in 1993. It is because of this context, the European Union's concern over its external borders, and the abundant politics of fear (Andersson 2019; Huysmans 2006; Van Houtum and Lacy 2020) that increasingly violent border enforcement in countries like Greece has been condoned, sometimes even supported. The recent revelations that led to the departure of the head of Frontex, Fabrice Leggeri (Rankin

2022), *only* became a problem for the agency—and the European Union—because Frontex's involvement in pushbacks was made public by large news agencies around Europe. I say this because, during my fieldwork, everyone at the grass-roots level knew what happened at the borders—a voice loud enough to broadcast it was simply missing at the time.

## LESVOS: THE NAMELESS DEAD

Lesvos, in the Aegean Sea in close proximity to Turkey, is the third largest island in Greece, with an area of roughly 1633 square kilometres and 86 000 residents. The island is of volcanic origin and its mountainous geography varies from lush emerald green hills to arid and dusty plains. Major exports include olives from the island's millions of olive trees and ouzo, a strong aniseed-flavoured liquor, which locals often also enjoy with a meal at local tavernas. The northern coast of Lesvos is a stretch of a little over 30 kilometres of coastline, measured roughly from the village of Molyvos—now Míthymna in Greek—in the west to the village of Tsonia in the east. Despite the tourism industry being a major source of income on the island, most of the northern landscape is a far cry from the picturesque sandy beaches of travel brochures. In fact, in the north of the island most of the coastline consists of beaches that are narrow, rocky, and rough. Among both humanitarians and authorities, this stretch of coastline is commonly referred to as the North Shore.

It is on the North Shore, precisely on the kind of beaches I described above, where the majority of arrivals took place when the migrant crossings intensified in 2015.[6] These beaches remain a popular destination for dinghies and speedboat drop-offs leaving the Turkish coast just some ten kilometres away on the other side of the Aegean Sea. During my fieldwork, the

beaches were littered with rubbish, empty plastic water bottles and soda cans, pieces of packaging materials, sea urchins, animal bones, and faeces. Here and there, the debris of illegalised (De Genova 2002) human mobility, signs of what the *Guardian* (2019) saw fit to refer to as the 'fearful dispossessed rattling Europe's gates' was visible: life vests, scraps of rubber torn from destroyed dinghies, pieces of shiny emergency blankets glistening in the sun, wooden planks from fishing boats, and discarded Turkish residence permits lying around. From the hills of Mount Lepetimnos overlooking the narrow Mediterranean passage, one can observe various layers of mobility, of people and goods: fishing boats, sailing boats, ferries, recreational divers, and cargo ships, as well as the occasional migrant dinghy. In 2019, equally present were those who sought to deter, intercept, and vigil these mobilities: the Hellenic and Turkish coast guards, the British Border Force, and Frontex vessels from various European Union member states such as Italy, Croatia, Portugal, The Netherlands, or Latvia.

'Here you have the Christians', the elderly caretaker at the cemetery of Ágios Panteleimonas in Mytilíni, the capital of the island, explained in the summer heat of 2019, making a sweeping gesture with his hand from north to east. He continued, 'and there… there are the *ágnostoi*'. In the northwest corner of the cemetery, next to a digger and a two-metre pile of rubbish, lay some 70 to 90 graves of migrants buried between 2007 and 2015. The burials stopped in the autumn of 2015, following a shipwreck (Forensic Architecture 2015a) that cost the lives of dozens, over 80 according to my research participants, which forced the local authorities to open a new cemetery for migrants in an olive grove at Kato Tritos. The exact numbers of migrants buried in Ágios Panteleimonas is unknown, because, by the time the restoration

work for this corner of the cemetery began, rain and mudslides had resurfaced a considerable number of bones buried there and moved them around the site, making it impossible to determine how many individuals there were without an extensive forensic investigation. The new graves are uniform in shape and size, with virtually no decoration save for a single pink plastic rose someone had fairly recently placed on a few of them; light grey bricks lined a pile of gravel. Much of the materials seemed to be recycled. On top, instead of a gravestone a marble plaque was placed roughly where the head of the body would normally lie. Some plaques had a name, but most simply carried the word '*ÁGNOSTOS*' written in capital letters. Often the plaques also had two sets of numbers, on the first row, the date—or simply the year—of either the recovery or the burial of the body and, on the second row, a registry number from either the coast guard or the pathologist's office that examined the body. The post-mortem examination is often superficial because from a legal point of view, for example, all migrant drownings are treated as accidents which warrant no closer examination—or search for someone responsible. Equally, there has been no common standard regarding what information should be included on the plaques. Sometimes, there are no plaques.

DNA samples were not collected from migrant bodies in Greece until 2015, and the practice is still, eight years later, not monitored in any kind of effective manner. Those buried at Ágios Panteleimonas without a name will stay that way—this is not a cemetery from where repatriations of bodies take place. Crucially, there are two distinct forms of forensic neglect at play. First of all, the neglect displayed in the way this corner of the cemetery was abandoned at the mercy of the natural phenomena, whereby rain and mudslides made even counting

bodies impossible. Second, the majority of the individuals buried there have not been identified, not simply because of circumstances, but *by design*. For example, forensic professionals with experience in the identification of migrant bodies across Greece told me, in confidence, that the chain of evidence had been routinely broken. Authorities on the island have not followed the principle of retaining one file number across the 'life' of a body. Instead, two numbers have been in use: one issued by the police and another one by the pathologist's office. With no DNA samples, no proper map of the graves, and only poor records of each body, it becomes impossible to return to cases years, maybe even a decade, later.

## EVROS: INTO THE VIOLENT BORDERS

'Look, there's Edirne [in Turkey]. And there', my companion directs my gaze with his hand as we stand on top of a hill on a chilly February afternoon in 2020. 'There's Bulgaria. You'll want to take a picture of this intersection.' The Evros region in Western Thrace, encompassing roughly 4200 square kilometres, is named after the river Evros—Meriç in Turkish or Maritsa in Bulgarian—running along the border until it joins the Aegean Sea in the south. This area is where Greece shares its only land border with Turkey, but where it also meets Bulgaria, its northern neighbour. It is an area replete with long histories of forced displacement, from the 1923 population exchange with Turkey to being occupied by Germany's Bulgarian allies during the Second World War. Once Orthodox Greeks were a minority amongst minorities, but now make up the majority of residents in the prefecture. The north of the country is also home to much of Greece's Muslim population, amongst them the Turkish and the Pomaks, and

the Thracian Roma. In contrast to Lesvos, there are no tourists in this area mostly consisting of mountains, small villages and towns, and agricultural land. In winter it snows. During my stay, I constantly explained to inquiring locals that I was not from Frontex, the only northern European presence aside from journalists every now and then in this part of the country. As the site of the geographical location of the border, it is also here that bordering tactics take on their most intense form (Topak 2014). The area has always been heavily militarised, especially from 1974 onwards following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. In the 2000s, however, a national threat other than Turkey was also produced at both the national and the European Union level: migrants (Grigoriadis and Dilek 2019). With the exception of locals with farmland in the area, no civilian is allowed to enter the border zone. Sometimes openly, sometimes secretly, the police surveil journalists and researchers in nearby towns. Arrests and harassment are commonplace.

A few days later, I am one floor below ground level at the pathologist's office in the regional capital. The middle-aged man who receives me has performed autopsies on all dead migrants in the Evros region in northern Greece registered by authorities in the past 20 years. On his shelves, there are old cases placed in folders at the top and at the bottom copying paper boxes full of the personal effects from the unidentified deceased. On his desk stand a computer, a printer, and two ashtrays. 'Before 2010', he tells me, 'it was always the same story: Kurds fleeing and young men leaving their homes to look for ways to provide for their families. After 2010, we began to see families, women, and children.' The causes of death have stayed the same, amongst them drowning in the Evros River, hypothermia, accidents, and medical conditions (Pavlidis and Karakasi 2019).

From 1974 until 2008, there were also thousands of M16A1 'bouncing' antipersonnel mines on an 11-km stretch of the border (Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor 2006; Pavlidis and Karakasi 2015), which claimed numerous migrant lives. The pathologist tells me of one case of violent death, a mother and her children murdered in an abandoned building, but my fieldwork experience tells me there might be more which were never identified as such, perhaps because of the stage of decomposition at which the bodies were when discovered—if the body was ever discovered. It is late February 2020 as we discuss the bodies and the work of a pathologist, and the pressure at the border is growing. Media is saturated with teargas-stained pictures of the border fence and of migrants throwing stones at masked police. Not long after our discussion it is revealed that a young man from Aleppo had been shot and killed by Greek border forces (see Forensic Architecture 2020b for details of the incident).

From talking to locals, it is obvious that migrants crossing the border have been a common sight in the region for some 30 years. So, too, have border deaths and disappearances. Alex, a man in his late 40s, remembers when he completed his military service in the region in the mid-1990s:

> We were on a border patrol when the local farmers requested help. There was something blocking the water pump providing irrigation to the fields. It was a man, a refugee. He had drowned while trying to cross the river and then drifted right into the pump. Other times we would find a group of them huddled on an islet in the middle of the river. We would hand them over to the police, who would then begin to abuse them.

There are unnamed graves and pits around the region and all records prior to 2000 are unavailable. As in Lesvos—or anywhere in Greece—there were individuals who felt their duty was to do all they could to account for the disappeared and work towards identification. This included people like the pathologist who preserved box after box of personal effects in the hope that they would be useful later. But, systemic neglect was prevalent. It was not simply that people remained unidentified in Greece; they were actively non-identified.

## FORENSIC BORDERING

Other scholars have examined forensic science at the borders in the Mediterranean (M'charek 2018; M'charek and Black 2019) or the lack thereof (Kovras and Robins 2016). I have a slight different goal by invoking forensic *bordering*, since I concentrate on the longevity—and polymorphic quality—of borders, as well as on the aims of bordering practices. As I suggested earlier, the term 'bordering' essentially has two levels (see also Van Houtum 2021: 35–36). At one level, it draws out what states and bodies like the European Union do, including the laws they put forward, the treaties they sign, and the political, diplomatic, and military solutions they push. Put another way, it is how masses of people are categorised and how geographies are given their political meaning. At another level, bordering describes what happens when the laws, treaties, agreements, politics, and, indeed, intentions are put into practice. This includes how borders are observed and enforced, how spaces are divided and managed, and how bodies are marked. Forensic bordering also operates at these both levels. On the one hand, it manifests at the policy level—for example, what resources are allocated and where—on

the other hand, it is a set of practices. Crucially, it is border violence by other means. It is an aggregation of practices which reveal, draw, and inflict the border on the dead body of a migrant and establish a continuity between illegalisation and marginalisation in life and illegalisation and marginalisation in death. Put another way, Zahira Aragüete-Toribio (2022: 6) notes how the forensic methods can be perceived as a form of 'care' for the bodies, in stark contrast to the violence they met while they were still alive (see also M'charek and Black 2019). However, forensic bordering is the exact opposite in that it seeks to actively maintain—emotionally, symbolically, and physically—the violence of borders.

Thus I focus on the instantiation of such bordering in Greece. But, it is worth noting that, again, such practices also reflect broader European approaches—as well as their international acceptance and facilitation. As Greek border police and military have violently pushed migrants back, their cruelty has been legitimised and, indeed, concealed by the European Union's own agency, Frontex (e.g. Christides and Lüdke 2022). Similarly, forensic bordering reflects not simply the incompetence or malice of the Greek military, police, and forensic authorities. Forensic bordering also reflects a broader European trend of letting the migrant bodies piling up constitute, together with barbed wire and defence technologies, another border wall for the European Union border regime to use to deter further migration from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Often, migrants originate from the precise regions deprived and wrecked by European colonial aspirations and conquests of the past as well as the economic and military dominance of the present (see Laakkonen 2022: 2; Danewid 2017: 1679–1680; Hawthorne 2023).

## NON-IDENTIFYING THE 'OTHER'

At a minimum, the basic forensics in Greece are supposed to include an autopsy to determine the cause of death as well as—hopefully—characteristics such as age and—assumed—gender and DNA and tissue samples. In addition, an autopsy allows for cataloguing any identifying features, such as tattoos and scars. Often, some of this information may be either missing or hard to retrieve. The second form of enacting violence on migrant bodies takes place in morgues. Ninna Nyberg Sørensen and Laura Huttunen (2022: 322) note how, while biometric technologies are generally met with criticism and suspicion, forensic technologies for identification are embraced almost unanimously. Such technologies offer a chance for relatives to learn where their loved ones are and what happened to them. Furthermore, forensic technologies allow for the cause of death to be determined in the aftermath of mass violence, genocides, and enforced disappearances. There is an aura of veracity and accountability about them. However, Sørensen and Huttunen (2022: 333) also point out that, in the context of Mediterranean migrations, 'forensic analyses of the cause of death do not travel to courtrooms or political arenas where questions of accountability are debated and fought over'. In Greek border policies, it is precisely the denial of identification—and, indeed, accountability—which matters.

When von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, made the comparison to a shield in her address, she referred to, and enforced, a notion already present in the official state narrative in Greece. For example, the name 'Aspida' was given to a border enforcement operation in the Evros region as early as 2011. Forensic investigations in the aftermath of mass violence or enforced disappearances build on

interaction and cooperation between researchers and locals (Aragüete-Toribio 2022; Nyberg Sørensen and Huttunen 2022). But, since the premise of border violence and enforcement at the Greek borderlands is to prevent such local communities from being formed in the first place, such cooperation can hardly exist and can never build on an extensive everyday information base and historical knowledge. Similarly, if bones, and by extension dead bodies more generally, possess the ability to 'do things' with their 'emotive and affective potency' (Krmpotich, Fontein and Harries 2010: 372–373), it is the precise goal of non-identifying practices, and forensic bordering more generally, to suppress such potentialities.

'Look, even if I'm one of them, I wouldn't trust most of the pathologists [with post-mortem examinations of migrants]. They're crazy. And nobody wants to do that work, anyway', a Greek forensic professional told me in Athens over a cup of coffee. They leaned forward over the table and went on to list all of the problems in the Aegean, island by island, and the mainland. They told me of situations where the forensic examinations were not even carried out by trained pathologists, but by other medical professionals. Of course, resources and professional incompetence or indifference played a role in the non-identification of migrants. However, what mattered even more was the hostile, and racist, anti-migration sentiment (see e.g. Dalakoglou 2013; Karamanidou and Kasparek 2022; Kirtsoglou and Tsimouris 2018), which had by the time of my fieldwork become the official policy.

The Greek state ramped up its violence against migrants crossing the border, intensifying its pushbacks to Turkey and the brutalisation of migrants (Christides, Lüdke and Popp 2019; Christides et al. 2021; Christides et al. 2022; Forensic Architecture 2022; Karamanidou and

Kasparek 2022). As people on the move are forced to navigate increasingly dangerous routes and means for crossing to avoid such fates, the proportional share of border deaths vis-à-vis the total number of crossings has grown.[7] Many of these dead remain unknown for obvious reasons. For example, there are no DNA samples to compare and due to the condition of the body, sometimes even conscientious pathologists had very little with which to work. But, many remained unidentified for completely different reasons. They remained non-identified through the everyday procession of forensic bordering, the border wall erected from unknown bodies: contaminated DNA samples, undiscovered prostheses, and ignored violence. When examinations remained only superficial, very little information was recorded for each body—further diminishing the chances of an identification. At the same time, the push from either the European Union or Greek authorities to establish effective common protocols or increase the resources for the identification work done with migrant bodies has remained missing.

If families were looking for their relatives, they were left to do the legwork by themselves, visiting pathologists' offices or through informal middlemen. These middlemen were other migrants, sometimes from the same ethno-linguistic group who had lived in Greece longer, perhaps worked with NGOs, and skilled in navigating bureaucratic networks. One such middlemen I met was Ali, who had lived in Greece for a decade. He told me how he regularly received photographs from people whose family member had disappeared while crossing to Greece. With the photograph and other additional information, he would visit authorities and pathologists, hoping to find a trace or even be able to identify someone. He admitted this of course also took place outside

the formal legal recognition procedures, and forensic professionals noted to me that they would not consider a photograph alone to be a valid tool for identification. However, that was what people looking for answers had to rely on because, more often than not, the police or forensic authorities would do nothing on their own. Furthermore, denying families the possibility of a burial and mourning was not only a product of the anti-migration stance assumed by authorities, it was also one of its crucial vehicles: it enforced the 'otherness' of border-crossers past, present, and future, and made clear they were not worthy of being treated like fellow human beings.

## NOT CARING FOR THE DEAD

The third form of violence enacted on migrant bodies happens during the burial. That people must die unidentified as a direct result of border enforcement and anti-migration policies is a form of violence in itself. But, there is more to burials and cemeteries that warrant exploration. First, it is illustrative to turn to Greek burial traditions, which have several particular characteristics. A traditional practice, one that has survived until today especially in areas including Athens where a limited amount of land is available for burials, is that the dead are exhumed after around three to five years to make room for another burial. If the body has been properly skeletonised—a process which depends greatly on the type of soil available in the cemetery—at that time, the bones are moved to a box and transferred to an ossuary, a building specifically designated for their storage. If the skeletonisation is not complete, the remains are often moved to another plot at the cemetery to finish the process. Often, family members are present for the exhumation as they were during the initial burial. In the

classic ethnography of death rituals in rural Greece, Loring M. Danforth and photographer Alexander Tsiaras (1982) documented how much care is devoted to the dead in the village in which they carried out their research. From washing the bodies to tending to the bones, and to the detailed mourning practices, the dead are very much present, identified, and acknowledged. This relationship to the dead and to their bodies, though transformed over time into a less elaborate and dogmatic form, persists today.

What, then, happens to migrant bodies? Especially after the 2010 economic crash, my research participants explained that burying your dead has become somewhat of a luxury in certain parts of Greece. Or, as a forensic professional put it during one of our discussions over a beer, 'There are people who cannot afford to die.' Burial costs and cemetery plots are extremely expensive, especially in cities like Athens whereby often only fairly well-off Greek citizens can afford the large, elaborate white marble graves aboveground for which Greek cemeteries are known. During one of our discussions, I was told by another forensic professional that the morgue in Piraeus, Athens, had around a dozen unclaimed bodies every month because families could not afford to collect them. A walk in an Athenian cemetery will reveal graves beyond repair, with skulls exposed, bones barely covered by the cloth wraps they were buried in, and bones which have fallen to the grass after exhumation and during the transportation from graves to bone pits or the ossuary, all depending on the financial status of the bereaved. If the state has ignored its own poorest citizens in this way, what would it afford migrants, the outsiders, the often unwanted and uncared for?

The reason I began this part with a description of Greek burial traditions is because

they form a quite specific context in which migrant burials take place, but also because it highlights the discrepancy between how dead bodies 'ought to be' treated and how they actually are treated. First of all, migrant bodies, or bones, are exhumed the same way as any other remains would be, often with very little record kept of what happened to them afterwards. Exhumation is often a point after which, if it has not already, the 'migrant trail' goes cold. Furthermore, during my fieldwork, I encountered dead migrants who were never registered at the cemetery as well as those who were buried in the wrong grave. One such case involved an Iraqi man, whose remains had been misplaced and put in the grave of another person. This was a rare occurrence where the body was successfully identified, but even then his relatives would actually mourn at the grave of someone they did not know. I also visited mass graves, some even at cemeteries, where it would be impossible to tell who was laid there. I once accompanied a forensic professional to a cemetery to check on some graves of identified migrant bodies buried a few years prior. Once on site, we learned that there was no record of them in the cemetery registry.

In 2019, a forensic professional told me that they had so far mapped around 900 graves themselves, of which only around 40 per cent had a gravestone or a plaque. Moreover, even if a body was identified after burial, adding the name on the plaque would require a prosecutor's order and, thus, remained gated behind a hefty pile of paperwork. Another matter specific to migrant burials was the difficulty of determining the religion of the deceased, since this dictated if they should be buried in a Christian or an Islamic cemetery. Pathologists and religious leaders looked for a variety of determinants such as tattoos, signs of male circumcision, or personal effects, but such methods were

naturally unreliable and sometimes the bodies were in such a condition that such details were missing. Even with a well-preserved body, it was obvious that determining someone's religious affiliation from physical evidence alone was all but guesswork (see also Zagaria 2019: 27–28).

It is also worth noting that anti-migration policies not only affected the atmosphere or motivation of professionals and authorities, but also had quite tangible effects on the families and friends of disappeared migrants. As noted, there are strict requirements around entry and residence everywhere in Europe, and so it is in Greece as well. Given that the whole system is based on the idea that non-European, noncitizen, and, non-white migrants are not supposed to come in the first place, let alone stay in the country, it is extremely difficult for those without a visa, residence permit, or citizenship to even come looking for their missing loved ones.[8] In many cases, it required a similar, potentially fatal journey, one on which those already disappeared had risked their lives. Even if those left behind had safely arrived in Greece, chances were that arrival occurred years after the disappearance. This made finding people, or even the right grave, highly unlikely.

There is, however, a crucial difference between the neglect faced by even the poorest Greek citizens and dead migrants: only the former will invoke moral outrage. For example, with the COVID-19 pandemic, cemeteries were filling up quickly, which provoked debates about death, dignity, and duty (see e.g. THETOC 2020). Such debates regarding migrant deaths and burials never seemed to occur during my fieldwork. No one is monitoring or protesting against the indifferent burials of migrants or their bodies' maltreatment at the hands of authorities. Even if Christian eschatology, and even more so, Orthodox Christian eschatology, is concerned with respect towards and the

preservation of the body, I learnt that such considerations depend entirely on the personal conviction of the pathologists and other authorities. A superficial examination followed by a hasty burial was generally the standard.

## CONCLUSIONS

When analysing Mediterranean migration and border enforcement, Maurizio Albahari (2015) invoked the notion of 'crimes of peace' (see also Scheper-Hughes 1997) to account for the 'ambitious, laborious, and resilient administrative, political, and ideological work of maintaining a "system" that has proven crumbling and volatile and that *keeps proving* unjust, violent, and unequal' (Albahari 2015: 21, emphasis in the original). In short, the very acts of supposedly fighting 'criminality' and 'illegality' in migration become crimes themselves. Violence against migrant bodies, both alive and dead, at the Greek borderlands is also structural in the sense that it conceals and rejects accountability, but equally very much an active practice with visible perpetrators: the police, the military, the politicians, and so forth.

In the context of Lesvos, Sarah Green (2010: 269) noted that once the bodies have washed ashore in Greece, they will not leave the country. Unlike living human beings, the dead cannot be assaulted and pushed to the river or forced on inflatable rafts and towed to Turkish territorial waters. They must be buried on Greek soil. Even today, the repatriations of identified migrant bodies remain rare. This fact is, first and foremost, behind the practices I have identified as forensic bordering in Greece. The dead go unnamed, and the disappearances are not followed up. Such practices, or the lack thereof, are intimately connected to the wider border regime and the anti-migration politics currently prevalent not just in Greece, but across

Europe. These policies seem to be built on the premise that migrants crossing into Greece in a bid to reach refuge in the European Union were not only a national threat, as the continuing references to Greece as a 'shield' suggest. But, there was also the notion that those attempting to cross were not equal human beings in the first place. This dehumanisation manifested in how structures—or the absence of structures—ensured that not just un-identification, but *non-identification* prevailed, as well as by the way the families of the disappeared were left without answers even when they looked for some. Unlike in the Tunisian case explored by Valentina Zagaria (2019; 2020), the forensic technology required would be available, but it simply was not extended to migrant deaths. Migrant deaths were relegated to a sphere of their own—one of hostility and disdain.

Acts towards preserving dead migrants' dignity or attesting to their humanity in the Mediterranean context have been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Perl 2018; Zagaria 2019; 2020). My intention here has in no way been to suggest that such practices would not exist in Greece at all. Neither am I suggesting that various forms of solidarity, as evidenced by, for example, the building squats in Athens by grassroots actors together with refugees, would not exist. Rather, by focusing on forensic bordering, I have pointed out that such acts, when they take place, would go against the grain, potentially met with hostility. Through disappearances, non-identification, and the denial of answers, the Greek border regime, with complicity from the European Union, enforced the notion that entering Europe would not keep migrants safe—not in life and not in death.

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## NOTES

1   Various definitions exist, such as 'refugees', 'migrants', 'refugees and migrants', and 'refugees/migrants'. I have opted to use 'migrant' in its most inclusive sense, encompassing all people on the move in need of refuge from properly recognised, protracted, low-intensity conflicts and dispossession driven by capitalist accumulation, colonial extraction, and unequal global relations. In short, when I write 'migrants', I also mean 'refugees'.

2   The notion of not equal human being has also been previsously analysed. For example, Nick Vaughan-Williams (2015) explored the use of animalised metaphors used in relation to migration, as well as spaces like refugee camps as zoo-like, with migrants in cages, yet fully exposed to the outside gaze.

3   'Border violence' encompasses various forms of violence directed at people on the move, many of which will be explored later in this article. For a catalogue, see Border Violence Monitoring Network (2023b).

4 Elisabeth Kirtsoglou and Giorgos Tsimouris (2018) discuss how racism and xenophobia in Greece exemplify the distinction between 'us Greeks' and 'them Muslims', and associate migrants with criminality and rejection of European values, on the one hand, but also with displacement of the 'original' Greek inhabitants, on the other. Furthermore, Lena Karamanidou (2016: 2004) notes that violence against migrants, by both state and non-state actors, has been portrayed in Greece, together with being 'isolated events', as understandable reactions to migration's threat. as well as the denial of such violence's racialised nature by referring to Greece's European values (ibid.: 2012).

5 It is true, as Sarah Green (2013) argues, that the borders, even territories, of Europe have shifted over time. However, and no matter how much this has also shifted, Europe has always readily defined those who do not belong to its political, economic, and cultural sphere. Dimitris Dalakoglou (2016) has noted how borders and border enforcement have a distinct dual role in present day Europe: first of all, he points out how they represent a steady—and growing—spatial point of reference in the post-2008 world marked by insecurities, for example, regarding real estate and housing and, second, they act as a gateway to becoming European to Europe's former 'others'. Thus, by enforcing their borders, former seemingly 'peripheral' Eastern European countries have been able to move closer to the 'core' of (Western) Europe.

6 For the scale and impact of crossings to Lesvos in 2015 and 2016, see Evthymios Papataxiarchis (2016a; 2016b) and Katerina Rozakou (2017).

7 This has been a growing trend over the past few years. See, for example, https://www.unhcr.org/desperatejourneys/.

8 Greece has often had low recognition rates for asylum applications (see e.g. Karamanidou and Schuster 2012; Timothy Hatton 2021) and few routes for the regularisation of a stay (see Dalakoglou 2012 for some notes on recent history).

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*Timothy Raymond Anderson*

# LIFE IN 'PUNITIVE PROTECTION': THE PARADOX OF IMMIGRATION DETENTION IN ESTONIA

## ABSTRACT

The detention of irregular migrants in the European Union has increased in scope and intensity in the years following the 2016 'refugee crisis'. Detention is usually codified as an administrative practice, a neutral routine necessary for the surveillance of irregular migrants and the enforcement of immigration laws. However, this formally 'administrative' process belies a unique contradiction: although cast as a benign procedure, detention is often experienced by detainees as a form of punishment and incarceration in the absence of criminal charges. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork from the Metsa Detention Centre in Estonia, I argue that this paradox— what I term *punitive protection*—can make detention a disorienting and uncanny institution for migrants. Detainees experience 'punitive protection' as the tension between what they are *told* is real and what they are *certain* is real. For my informants, Metsa was not just a space of confinement, but an alternate reality where their beliefs, hopes, and struggles were denied by state practice.

Keywords: migration, detention, agency, refugee studies, criminology

## INTRODUCTION

They have me do the court visit online, on Skype. But it's just a screen. How do I know it's real? It could be like a play. This is a prison, after all—I don't trust them!

Omar's eyes darted back and forth between me and the guard seated near the door, as if waiting for a reaction. The officer glared back, yet remained silent. Omar leaned forward and continued:

You know, things are bad here. But, I tell myself, 'See, many famous people have been in prison for unfair reasons. I can be like them. Like Mandela!'

The guard snapped her pen on the table. '*Omaaar...*' She inflected her voice upwards in pitch. 'What did I tell you about this? We discussed this! This is *not* a prison.' Her voice was quiet, but sharp, as if scolding a misbehaving child.

Omar sat back in his chair and glowered at the door. He let his head droop and muttered

under his breath: 'Yeah, OK, whatever. Not a prison, OK?' The guard crossed her arms and softened her expression.

Scenes like this played out regularly during my visits to Omar at the Metsa Detention Centre. He seemed to find vindication in getting under the skin of his supervisors, one of the few ways he was able to assert himself while in detention. Every time we spoke, Omar was keen to show me what he believed was an absurdity: the way guards recoiled and protested whenever Metsa was referenced as a 'prison' during conversations. Why should they be so sensitive to this labelling, he wondered? Omar spoke of feeling imprisoned, constrained, and abused; the technicality that he was in 'administrative detention'—and not prison—made no difference.

Omar was not the only individual in Metsa who found the distinction between 'prison' and 'detention' absurd. The disorientation he described was also felt by my other informants in the facility. The reassurances of guards—who insisted that detainees were not being punished, imprisoned, and treated like criminals—only served to further upset and demoralise the detainees with whom I spoke. In fact, guards depicted detention in terms that were confounding for my informants; officers spoke of assisting migrants, protecting them from outside threats, and 'fixing' their mistakes. Metsa resembled an institution that served incompatible functions, simultaneously serving as a space of criminalisation, care, and paternalistic discipline. As my fieldwork advanced, I began to feel a similar sense of confusion and paranoia. Who could I trust? What was really going on behind the scenes?

In this article, I attempt to conceptualise and explain the contradictions I encountered in Metsa. The text is informed by the narratives of detainees, the rationalisations of state officials,

and the challenges I faced as a student trying to advocate for change. I propose a term that articulates this uncanny experience of immigration detention: *punitive protection*. Detainees experience 'punitive protection' as the tension between what they are *told* is real and what they are *certain* is real. Guards cultivate punitive protection—whether intentionally or not—by crafting an alternate reality, closing Metsa off from the outside world, and denying the validity of detainee knowledge, emotion, and experience. I argue that this process is made possible by the idiosyncrasy of detention law, which fuses the terms and technologies of criminal punishment with the benign framing of civil custody.

I do not intend 'punitive protection' to be read as an all-encompassing explanation for detainee suffering or frustration. Rather, it represents one critical dimension of life in detention, a paradox underpinning many of the interactions I observed between guards and detainees. In the following sections, I build a case for *punitive protection* through an analysis of my fieldwork among detainees, a tense interview with police officers, and the ambiguous legal framework for detention practice in Estonia.

## BETWEEN IMMIGRANTS AND 'CRIMMIGRANTS': FRAMING 'PUNITIVE PROTECTION'

A substantial body of literature within the social sciences has critiqued the *criminalisation* of migration by high-income countries like the United States and the United Kingdom (see Kramo 2014; Stumpf 2016; De Genova 2002). By 'criminalisation', these authors refer to the strengthening of penalties like the detention and deportation of irregular migrants, penalties that have become more prominent over the last

decade. Mary Bosworth, for example, notes an 'increasing convergence between criminal and immigration law as economically developed states have erected and enforced tougher visa requirements, instituted innovative forms of border policing, and adopted new sanctions against irregular entry' (Bosworth 2017: 52). In stressing this 'convergence', Bosworth does not mean that entering irregularly has become a crime *per se*; she is instead arguing that many of the terms and technologies of criminal justice (incarceration, surveillance, punishment, etc.) are now used in the 'management' of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants. In this way, the realms of criminal management and migration management overlap, sometimes in contradictory or ironic ways.

The detention of undocumented and irregular migrants is one of the key ways in which cross-border movement has been informally criminalised (Bosworth and Turnbull 2014; Lindberg 2022). Immigration detention resists easy definition, encompassing a broad array of regulations and practices around the world. Migrants may be held for hours, months, or years for unspecified reasons, and they can face widely varying material conditions while detained. In many cases, immigration detention is an informal, loosely regulated procedure, often carried out by private security contractors and invisible to the public eye. For this piece, I reference the approach suggested by Silverman and Massa (2012: 679), who contend that immigration detention can be defined as:

> [T]he holding of foreign nationals, or noncitizens, for the purposes of realising an immigration-related goal. This defini-tion is characterised by three central ele-ments: first, detention represents a depri-vation of liberty; second, it takes place in a designated facility in the custody of an immigration official; and, third, it is being carried out in the service of an immigra-tion-related goal.

This definition is useful because it highlights the 'quasi-punitive' nature of immigration detention, an experience that 'approximates imprisonment' despite its origins in civil and administrative law (Kalhan 2011: 42; Puthooparambil et al. 2015). In other words, immigration detention centres use the technologies and practices of criminal incarceration under the 'seemingly innocuous fiat of immigration administration' (Silverman and Massa 2012: 678). There is an ambiguity and obscurity to immigration detention, which is both a service carried out by the state and a form of involuntary—often highly afflictive—confinement. Silverman and Massa (2012: 677) argue that these particularities make immigration detention a 'unique' practice that 'warrants special critical attention' from migration scholars.

Melanie Griffiths (2013) provides an example of the distinctive psychological toll that detention incurs upon migrants. Reflecting upon ethnographic fieldwork she conducted in a UK detention centre, she argues that immigration detention 'operates on the basis of instability and uncertainty, characterised by the unexpected' (Griffiths 2013: 279). This instability is linked to its status as an administrative, bureaucratic institution that is nonetheless 'prison-like' in experience and aesthetic (Griffiths 2013: 265). These tensions are further exacerbated by the UK's use of 'indefinite' detention, meaning that there is no maximum amount of time for which a noncitizen can be detained. For detainees, this means life is governed by a 'dual temporal uncertainty': 'people are simultaneously afraid that their detention will end at any moment without warning, and that they will remain forgotten in detention forever' (Griffiths 2013:

271). Forced to live with minimum information and maximum precarity, Griffiths' informants struggled to establish routines or find purpose.

The theme of 'temporal uncertainty' in detention has also been explored by other scholars, notably Jukka Könönen (2021), Nicolas DeGenova (2021), and Shahram Khosravi (2021). Könönen (2021: 721), reflecting upon fieldwork in the Finnish detention system, describes immigration detention as the 'waiting room of immigration law'. Nicolas DeGenova, similarly, highlights the power of the state to 'discipline' through time in detention centres. De Genova further argues that migrants, especially those with an insecure legal status, are characterised by a 'detainability'—'the unpredictable susceptibility to detection, arrest, and detention that is lived as a protracted socio-political condition in everyday life' (De Genova 2021: 192). Once in detention, De Genova contends that migrants are faced with a 'deeply ambiguous and profoundly punitive dimension of temporal indeterminacy' (De Genova 2021: 190). He clarifies:

> Time spent in detention is not an anticipatory waiting towards a projected future; rather, it is commonly experienced as a compulsory waiting with no definite horizon… commonly perceived to be irredeemably wasted and lost. (De Genova 2021:191)

Griffiths (2013), De Genova (2021), and Könönen (2021) all show that detention is commonly experienced by migrants as a form of criminalisation, punishment, and space of overwhelming stress—despite its putatively bureaucratic legal context. I found the same conditions present in Metsa. However, my fieldwork also uncovered another aspect of the detention experience, an irony that operated alongside the ambiguity and temporal uncertainty described above: the confinement of migrants is sometimes justified by state actors as a practice intended to serve migrants' interests. In these cases, detention is not only framed as a necessary administrative routine, but also as a paternalistic form of *protection* of migrants.

One striking example of this irony comes from the UK, where state officials have agreed to forcibly 'relocate' registered asylum seekers to facilities in Rwanda for detention, processing, and possible resettlement (Chaloner et al. 2022: 1). This decision was met with a wave of searing critiques from British migration scholars and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), who described the relocation as an egregious affront to human rights (Beirens and Davidoff-Gore 2022; O'Connor 2022; Sen et al. 2022). The decision to pursue this plan also prompted protests (including a coordinated hunger strike) at detention centres around the UK (Shalaby and Nader 2022). One asylum seeker interviewed by the BBC viewed this relocation as the ultimate denial of his dignity and humanity; he was 'ready to die, but not to be moved to Rwanda' (Shalaby and Nader 2022).

The implications of this relocation policy are harrowing. Yet, a close reading of the UK government memorandum on the topic reveals something curious. Relocating to and detaining asylum seekers in Rwanda is not justified as a punitive or security-oriented measure, but rather as an act of generosity that protects asylum seekers:

> [We acknowledge] the need to provide better international protection for refugees and… provide protection and a durable solution to those in need whilst preventing abuse.
> [We wish] to develop new ways of addressing the irregular migration

challenge… in order to counter the business model of the human smugglers, protect the most vulnerable, manage flows of asylum seekers and refugees, and promote durable solutions. (UK Home Office 2022)

In this memorandum, the antagonists are not asylum seekers, but 'human smugglers' (UK Home Office 2022). Yet, the UK government is not combating smuggling by, for example, providing safer pathways into Britain. Instead, the government aims to counter smuggling by punishing the migrants who do make it across UK borders. Paradoxically, the Rwanda agreement appears intended as both a deterrent to seeking asylum in the UK and an act of 'care' towards asylum seekers. The subtext is surreal: if asylum seekers resist this new policy, it is because they are irrational and do not understand what is 'best' for them.

While occurring in a different context, the UK–Rwanda deal provides an example of the 'punitive protection' I observed with the confines of Metsa. The claims of the UK government, in both their absurdity and their repetition, engender an alternate reality where migrants cannot 'really' be harmed by British state practices. In Metsa, my informants highlighted their experiences of abuse, oppression, and manipulation, only to be contradicted again and again by the claims of institutional officers. Instead, police spoke of Metsa as categorically benign—that is, as a space of migrant accommodation, protection, and discipline. The resulting tension was profound, in some cases bringing my informants to the brink of an ontological crisis.

Other anthropologists have proposed similar concepts regarding marginalising state practices towards migrants. For example, Menjívar and Abrego (2012) referred to the 'legal violence' inflicted upon undocumented

migrants within the United States. As such, they approach legal violence as 'the harmful consequences of implementing a restrictive body of law that criminalises individuals' (Menjívar and Abrego 2012: 1413). This violence manifests as structural disadvantage, exclusion, and abuse, which become 'normalised' and 'legitimated' for both migrants and public officials (Menjívar and Abrego 2012: 1413).

While detention can be approached as a form of legal violence, my writing on punitive protection attempts to capture a different dynamic of the detainee experience. In my fieldwork, detainees explicitly *rejected* the state logic of detention practice, openly mocking and excoriating guards who refused to acknowledge their treatment as 'punishment'. My informants did not internalise this symbolic violence; rather, they resisted it, arguing that Estonian police were misappropriating the human rights discourse and acting in unlawful ways. The conflict between police rhetoric and detainee experience persisted.

Furthermore, Garnier et al. (2018: 2), drawing from Agier (2011), utilised the term 'humanitarian governance' to describe the genre of bureaucratic practices towards migrants that '[involve] care *and* control'. These authors focused on refugee resettlement, a practice they argue is simultaneously 'an important tool for protecting vulnerable civilians' and 'an unaccountable, costly process permeated by inequality' (Garnier et al. 2018: 2). In effect, humanitarian governance strips away migrant agency, as states and NGOs speak 'for' these individuals by making choices on their behalf.

There is much overlap between 'humanitarian governance' and 'punitive protection'. Indeed, in detention, the state professes to protect migrants while isolating them and speaking on their behalf. Ultimately, detainees are rendered invisible as wards of the

state. However, detention is also—at least, in Estonia—not framed as a humanitarian practice legally, nor does it involve collaboration with NGOs or human rights organisations. Moreover, detention is not a response to a specific migrant need or request. Instead, detention in Estonia functions as an appendage of national security, embodying an uneasy fusion of law enforcement and asylum management.

## LEGAL CONTEXT

In the Republic of Estonia, entering the country without a valid document is not a crime, but an administrative violation handled outside the criminal justice system (Riigikogu 2014; Estonian Ministry of the Interior 2015).[1] Detainees have the right to appeal their detention with a state-provided lawyer after 48 hours, in line with the European Union (EU) Reception Conditions Directive. However, by this point, detainees have already been forcibly separated from most forms of communication, are under constant surveillance, and have limited access to outside aid. It can be difficult for detainees to know their rights and understand how to pursue them.

Estonia, like most EU member states, has agreed to the Returns Directive, a document that stipulates 'common standards and procedures for returning illegally staying third-country nationals' (Council of the European Union 2018). In other words, this agreement sets the framework for the detention and deportation of migrants within the EU. The Returns Directive limits detention terms to a maximum of 18 months. Estonia opted to adopt this maximum limit, and in some cases allows for two detention sentences of up to 18 months each.[2]

In contrast to nearby EU countries like Finland, Sweden, and Latvia, Estonia does not have a separate agency or civilian organisation that receives migrants and evaluates asylum claims. For example, *Migrationsverket* in Sweden is the national agency that examines asylum and residence permit applications. Although they cooperate with the police, *Migrationsverket* is a distinct entity trained to provide counselling, housing, and financial support to migrants who need it (Migrationsverket 2019). In Estonia, all migration policy is enforced by the *Politsei-ja Piirivalveamet* (PPA), an agency under the Ministry of the Interior which oversees security and crime prevention. The PPA includes police officers, border guards, and migration officials together under one umbrella. In Metsa, the guards are specialised police officers, trained in law enforcement and criminal punishment.

All migrants arriving to Estonia, including asylum seekers, can be detained for the following reasons:

1) identification of the person or verification of the identity;
2) verification or identification of the citizenship of the person;
3) verification of the legal bases of the entry into and the stay in the state of a person;
4) identification of the circumstances relevant to the proceedings of the application for international protection, primarily in the case when there is a risk of escape;
5) there is a reason to believe that the person has submitted an application for international protection to postpone the obligation to leave or prevent expulsion;
6) protection of the security of state or public order;
7) transfer of a person in the procedure provided for in Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament

and of the Council, if there is a risk of escape of a person [this is often referred to as 'flight risk'] (Riigikogu 2019: 361)

I draw attention here to numbers 5 and 6, the grounds for detention which are open to a large degree of interpretation by the PPA. In court, these claims do not require proof—they are based on the suspicion of police officials who need only provide a compelling 'reason to believe'. The enforcement of security and public order overlaps with criminal law and antiterrorism legislation, granting the PPA explicit power to detain potential noncitizen criminals as a preventive measure.

## ENCOUNTERING METSA

I first became aware of Metsa during fieldwork at an asylum accommodation centre in central Estonia, a facility where I conducted the majority of my PhD fieldwork. At this centre, I met several asylum seekers who had previously been held in Metsa. They painted a bleak picture of detention in Metsa, describing an institution shrouded in paranoia and severed from the outside world. One of these asylum seekers claimed that he had been held in Metsa—a facility he described as a 'prison'—for over a year after entering Estonia. These descriptions surprised me, and I began to investigate how to visit detainees in Metsa.

The process of arranging these visits was indirect. Before each visit, I had to call a central phone line to the detention centre, which was located in a common hallway. Once a detainee picked up the phone, I introduced myself and asked if anyone was interested in receiving a visit or sharing their story for my research. The interested detainee(s) then had to submit an application for a social visit, which included my name and national ID number. Once the guards approved the application, I received a confirmation email from the staff. This process limited my selection of informants, since they had to individually request my visit and be comfortable communicating in English. While the detainees discussed in this article were undocumented migrants or asylum seekers, the facility also held a significant number of Estonian residents awaiting deportation to their country of citizenship following a criminal charge. This distinct group did not feature in my fieldwork.

The Metsa detention centre sits on the western edge of Tallinn, surrounded by forests and sparsely populated suburbs. While the facility is only a 40-minute bus ride from the city centre, it feels remote and detached from the nearby urban environment. The walk to the detention centre from its closest bus stop is eerily quiet, only punctuated by occasional passing vehicles. During the time of my fieldwork (October 2017–April 2018), the centre housed approximately 20 to 25 detainees, although I was only able to meet with a few of them.

During each visit to Metsa, I had to go through a brief security 'ritual'. I was led through the front gate and to the front door of the centre by an officer, who instructed me to empty my pockets and to store any nonessential items in a locker and examined any items I brought for detainees. I was never allowed to bring an electronic device (including my phone) into the facility. The staff at the centre carefully recorded my name, ID number, address, and phone number during each visit, also logging any items I brought for detainees (anything containing glass, food, or metal was strictly forbidden).

As a further precaution, I was not allowed to directly hand any items to detainees. Direct physical contact with detainees was prohibited.

All gifts I brought (clothes, toiletries, USB sticks, or books) during my fieldwork were first given to Metsa staff, who inspected the items and only delivered them after I left the facility following a visit. All communication with detainees took place in a designated meeting room near the building's front entrance. My meetings were limited to two-hour time slots, and I was only allowed to speak with two detainees per visit. I was not given permission to see any other rooms or living quarters. During each meeting, we were monitored by a guard who sat at a nearby desk in the same room. On several occasions, guards stressed that I should 'be careful', advising me not to trust what detainees shared about their cases and conditions.

Anthropological fieldwork involving detainees is a challenging task, often requiring the researcher to balance opposing interests, negotiate with gatekeepers, and avoid re-traumatising informants. I faced numerous ethical dilemmas during my research given that I received differing accounts of detention conditions and risks from police and detainees. In general, I have made the choice here to represent my informants' experiences in their own words as much as possible, taking their claims and desires at face value. The detainees discussed here were aware of my status as a researcher and agreed to share their experiences in an academic context. All of them encouraged me to publicise their stories and advocate for their release. One of these informants, Khaled, also directly collaborated with me on this article following my fieldwork. He offered feedback on my arguments and provided additional details on his detention conditions.

To protect the privacy of those involved, I have changed or omitted all of the names of detainees, police officers, and other visitors to the centre. I also use a pseudonym for the detention centre itself: 'Metsa' (*forest* in

Estonian) was not the official name of the facility. I have further obscured or altered other identifying information, including certain countries of origin, personal background information, and case details. As a final note, I should note that the Metsa Detention Centre closed in late 2018—detainees and staff have since been moved to a new facility elsewhere in Estonia. All of the cases discussed in this article have since been resolved (either through deportation or formalisation), and I have taken care not to include information that could harm anyone involved.

## OMAR

Omar came to Estonia in 2017. After being apprehended at the Estonian border, Omar was transferred to Metsa, where he registered his case as an asylum seeker. While living in his country of citizenship, Omar had converted from Islam to Christianity. This made him an apostate, a crime punishable by execution in his theocratic birthplace. Omar thus predicated his asylum case on religious persecution, something he expected would be received warmly by Estonian authorities. By the time I met him in Metsa in late 2017, his initial asylum application had been rejected by the PPA. He was frustrated, cynical, and disillusioned with the notion of 'freedom' in Europe.

During my first meeting with Omar, he showed me a printed copy of his negative asylum decision. The decision had come as a shock to Omar, leaving him incredulous and confused. He claimed that Estonian authorities did not believe that he would face persecution in his home country, even asking him why he could not simply 'convert back' to Islam. Omar was indignant at this trivialising of his religious belief. He bitterly commented that Estonians 'must really like Islamic law' if they saw no

problem with his state's ultra-conservative regime. He struggled to believe the rationale for his negative decision; surely, Omar told me, a real court would see the validity of his asylum claim and reverse his detention.

Various verbal clashes with guards resulted in Omar receiving a reputation as a 'troublemaker' among staff. He openly expressed his disdain for the detention process, and was known for his provocative behaviour when receiving visitors. Omar wanted me to understand the mismatch between the guard's words and his experiences; he aimed to peel back the veneer of professionalism he believed was hiding nefarious practices. During our meetings, Omar was talkative and intense, having little patience for what he perceived as ignorance or dishonesty among staff and fellow detainees.

The social isolation and constant surveillance of his private life in Metsa put Omar under significant psychological strain. Omar's court appointments and meetings with his Estonian state-provided lawyer, often conducted via Skype, were alienating and surreal for him. During one fieldwork meeting quoted at the beginning of this article, Omar wondered aloud if the court appointments were at all real. He contended that they could be easily faked over video, and he had no way of verifying what was happening outside of Metsa. He viewed the guards as performers, thespians who carefully choreographed and rehearsed their interactions with detainees. Omar refused to be 'helped' by state actors; he regarded their speech as euphemistic and fallacious. If the guards were truly interested in his wellbeing, why was deportation the only option being offered? Why constrain his communication and interaction to such an extreme degree? Omar's musings sometimes veered into existential crises, during which he doubted his memories, senses, and

the ontology of his experiences. Given Omar's penchant for provocation and his ironic sense of humour, it was sometimes difficult for me to tell if he was being earnest or simply presenting a thought experiment.

Omar's playful language and keen understanding of the absurdity had its roots in his educational background. Omar had studied sociology in his home country, but he fled before completing his undergraduate degree. He shared his dreams of starting a new degree programme in Europe, perhaps focusing on philosophy or economic theory. He was a particular fan of Marx and Sartre, crediting them with sparking his interest in reading and academia. Despite the austere conditions of detention, I always saw Omar in colourful jeans and a crisp leather jacket, a style that popped against the dreary greyscale of the meeting room. He wanted to look good, he told me, even if there were few people to notice.

Over successive months of meeting Omar, his personality began to shift. At first, our conversations were energetic and witty as he sparred with me over differing interpretations of Marxism, libertarianism, and religious doctrine. He insisted that he would never return to his country of citizenship and refused to cooperate with deportation procedures. Over time, however, Omar grew sullen and withdrawn, hardly speaking at all during some of my final fieldwork meetings. When he did speak, he often stared out the barred window of the meeting room, which provided a narrow view of Metsa's backyard. His voice would break, and he seemed to have trouble keeping track of our discussion topics. Omar confessed that he was having difficulty trusting anyone—he worried that other visitors were collaborating with the Estonian police to undermine his case. He suspected that his lawyer was a spy. My non-European nationality provided Omar some

level of security, and he stated that he felt more comfortable speaking to an American than to an Estonian. By early 2018, Omar admitted that he had lost all faith in the Estonian asylum procedure, describing any further appeal of his decision as 'pointless'. He found risking death elsewhere preferable to another year of detention.

In late January, I received word from another detainee that Omar had been transferred to a psychiatric hospital following a suicide attempt. While in Metsa, Omar had been placed in solitary confinement after allegedly violating the rules in the facility. After being held in isolation for several days, he tried to kill himself and was later placed in psychiatric care. Although he preferred to remain in the hospital, Omar was forcibly taken back to Metsa later in the year.

My meeting with Omar after his suicide attempt was jarring. I was disturbed to see that he had been returned to Metsa despite his clear psychological distress and desire to remain under professional medical care. While the guards insisted that they took excellent care of detainees, it was exceedingly difficult for me to believe that Metsa was a suitable place for a suicidal person to recover. Omar never discussed the details of his suicide attempt or his time in solitary confinement, only alluding to it as a 'dark experience' and expressing intense anger at how the guards at Metsa had treated him. I wondered how the guards could possibly justify Omar's treatment; I was incredulous that officials would claim any fidelity to care or professionalism. Beside us, the guard on duty remained silent.

Omar's is one of the bleaker stories from my fieldwork, and his experiences reveal how detention practices can create a space in which asylum seekers are subject to punishment and deprivation—often with little formal recourse.

Yet, even in his darkest moments, Omar was keenly aware of the contradictions he experienced. For Omar, Metsa was a prison, and acknowledging this was a way granting legitimacy and meaning to his struggles. As a prisoner, he could connect his 'false imprisonment' in Metsa with the righteous suffering of the civil rights leaders and authors he admired. As someone under 'administrative detention', he was confused and humiliated. His feelings of deprivation and stress were denied by guards, who accused Omar of overreacting and implored him to cooperate with the deportation measures to 'fix' his mistakes. Officers insisted they were on Omar's side, trying to help him out of a bad situation—if only he would be reasonable and stop making such a fuss.

While Omar's despair was rooted in an experience of unjust punishment, another layer emerged during my interactions with him. Omar was not simply punished; he was punished *and* told it was a form of assistance. His anguish was both facilitated and denied by state officials. I contend this dissonance can be conceptualised as 'punitive protection'; Omar was immersed in an alternate reality from which he struggled to break free, even when he was certain that facts and principles were on his side.

## RANBIR

> It starts here, I get pain in my shoulders, and it moves down to my hands and my chest. It is like burning.

Ranbir traced the length of his arm with his finger, trying to show me the symptoms he had experienced for months. He closed his eyes and let out a sigh before continuing. Ranbir spoke slowly, deliberating on each word.

'The doctor… once, a doctor came in here and did some test, but I never heard back. The

people [guards] here, they don't understand. They don't care about my condition. I ask for help. They don't care. They only give me painkillers. They think I am, uh…'

He paused to think of the right word.

'…exaggerating?' I offered.

Yes, exaggerating.

The guard seated beside us cleared her throat and turned to me.

'[Detainees] here receive everything necessary under Estonian law. We can call in doctors to prepare blood tests, check-ups, look at symptoms, whatever is needed. People get good care here.'

Ranbir stared towards the window and shook his head. 'These people here [in Metsa] have a Soviet mentality. They don't understand… please help me.'

Ranbir was the oldest of my Metsa informants, a middle-aged man from India who had been in and out of detention for years. He belonged to a religious minority and was the son of a regional separatist. In the toxic political environment of Narendra Modi's India, Ranbir's family had faced increasing pressure to cease their activism. Ranbir described months of escalating threats from BJP[3]-allied gangs, culminating in a violent assault on him and his father. Ranbir fled, and his immediate family went into hiding. Looking for safety and stable employment, Ranbir travelled north with the goal of reaching Europe.

Ranbir was detained after entering Estonia since he could not produce a valid identity document. He applied for asylum while in detention, but was rejected after multiple appeals. This initial detention continued for 18 months—the maximum amount of time allowed under EU law for a single detention stay. Following this period, Ranbir was released to a homeless shelter in Tallinn. Without a

formal status, his every move became a legal transgression—he was not allowed to work, not allowed to rent a home, and not allowed to leave.

Ranbir's case illustrates a gap in Estonian law regarding rejected asylum seekers. After his initial 18-month detention period, he was stuck in legal limbo as a rejected asylum seeker who could not be deported or who would not cooperate with deportation procedures. This kind of situation, while unusual in Estonia, creates a double bind for those who experience it. Under the Dublin regulations, Ranbir was not permitted to leave Estonia, despite having no pathway to securing a formal status within the country. Alternatives exist to this kind of 'non-status'—Germany, for example, grants migrants in Ranbir's position a 'tolerated' (*geduldet*) status, which is limited in scope, but avoids criminalising employment (Kalkmann 2015: 41; Juran and Broer 2017). However, as of writing, Estonia does not have a legal category to cover this situation.

Shortly after his release, Ranbir travelled to another EU country; there, he attempted to get an appointment with a dentist for severe pain he had been experiencing in his teeth and gums. Ranbir's lack of proper documentation caused suspicion among the staff at the clinic, who then contacted local border police and arranged for his deportation back to Estonia.[4] Ranbir was taken back to Metsa, where he began to serve a second detention term.[5] I first met Ranbir in 2017, early during his second detention term. He had lodged a new asylum claim, noting to me that he had new video evidence from his family to prove their persecution. Ranbir recognised that having his second asylum claim taken seriously by the PPA was a long shot, especially given his detention and lack of access to other resources that could help his case.

Reflecting on Ranbir's experiences, I am reminded of a phrase—*'burning without*

*fire'*—used by Daniela DeBono (2017: 129) to describe the 'deportability' of undocumented migrants in Sweden. She quotes an Afghani asylum seeker disillusioned by the precarity of his life in a purportedly 'egalitarian' society:

> Most of the immigrants are coming here because they want to live in paradise, but what kind of paradise is this which is burning you without fire yeah. You're burning without fire in Sweden. (DeBono 2017: 131)

In Metsa, Ranbir also seems to 'burn without fire'. In a physiological sense, his pain was described to me as a ceaseless 'burning' across his upper arms and chest. In a psychological sense, he 'burned without fire' (i.e., without evidence or acknowledgement) as he struggled to convince Metsa staff of his ailments. According to officers, blood tests had revealed no clear or concerning reason for the affliction he described. In response, Ranbir pleaded for more specialised treatment, insisting that the tests performed so far were inadequate for understanding his condition. While migrants in Metsa have the right to public healthcare, the discretion of the PPA places a barrier between doctors and detainees. As a detainee in Metsa, Ranbir's pain was denied, rendered invisible.

As with Omar, I contend a deep contradiction is observable in Ranbir's experiences, something that exacerbated his physical pain, immobility, and temporal uncertainty. In denying Ranbir's pain, officers also denied his autonomy, his history, and any notion he was experiencing a punishment or unfair treatment at all. They cultivated 'punitive protection'—a paradox that forced Ranbir to justify the validity of his own feelings and sensations.

## KHALED

> 'I will be released into freedom or I will leave Metsa in a casket. I am willing to die here.'

Khaled delivered his words quietly, his voice rising just above a whisper, yet his conviction was clear. I stayed quiet for a few moments, letting the room fill with a heavy silence. My eyes darted over to the guard on duty—he was typing at his laptop, seemingly oblivious to the stakes of our conversation. Khaled followed and fixed his gaze on the officer. His eyes were searing in their intensity.

> 'I am confident that I will win. They think they can break me, but they are wrong.'

My memory of this encounter with Khaled is vivid. This was in April 2018, ten days after he had begun a hunger strike to protest his detention conditions. He was dishevelled and gaunt, yet appeared to harbour a barely suppressed fury towards Metsa and its staff. The moment was powerful, and it forced me to confront an unexpected dynamic at play in the detention centre. In Metsa's totalising, disorienting psychological environment, Khaled uncovered an institutional weakness.

Unlike Omar and Ranbir, Khaled was not an asylum seeker. He had travelled to Estonia to visit his child (a local citizen), but was apprehended by police after being unable to provide proper documentation. Khaled was cognizant of the fact that he was not a 'typical' Metsa detainee; he had a middle-class background, multiple graduate degrees, and a decade of professional experience in the EU. During my initial meeting with him, Khaled was cordial with detention officers, admitting to me that he had made a 'mistake' in entering

Estonia without the correct visa. He claimed to be cooperating with staff and was confident he would be released within days. By my next visit, however, Khaled was frustrated. He suspected that officers had been deceiving him about the nature of his case. Police claimed Khaled's status could be resolved with their help—but all pathways led to deportation and a re-entry ban. Such an outcome was unthinkable for Khaled, since it would separate him from his child who lived in Estonia for years. Instead, Khaled changed tack and decided to appeal his detention.

In a rare move, the Estonian appeals court ruled that the PPA did not have sufficient grounds to keep him in detention. His release, however, was short-lived. Once his court-ordered two-week interval concluded, Khaled was again apprehended by the PPA and returned to Metsa. In protest, Khaled began a hunger strike, demanding the right to reunite with his child. At this time, I also took a step that I believed would aid his defence: I wrote a letter of support, signed by myself and my supervisor, which I sent to Khaled's lawyer. This move triggered a backlash from the PPA, which complained to the university staff and specifically asked about the context surrounding my letter.

Given the conditions of Khaled's second session in detention, I expected to see him weakened, exhausted, perhaps close to capitulation with the PPA's deportation plans. Instead, each visit found him stronger, more determined, and more fervent in his pursuit of freedom. While his stature became frail, he seemed to radiate a fierce sense of purpose. Khaled was keen to understand every opportunity available to him in Metsa, recognising his mind and body as tools he could use to make political claims. Khaled refused to be defined by the PPA; he stressed that he was not an 'illegal migrant', a victim of

personal moral failings, or a pawn to be pushed around by migration officials. The guards were alarmed, concerned about the potential media ramifications of Khaled's hunger strike. Khaled's hunger strike had turned *time*—ordinarily a resource favourable to detention staff—into leverage. As the days passed, Khaled's withering figure and declining health became more apparent, more urgent, as if he were daring the guards to intervene.

Through a combination of pressure from Khaled's hunger strike and negotiations with his lawyer, the PPA and Khaled were able to reach a unique deal. Ordinarily, noncitizens deported from the EU are subject to a re-entry ban. However, if Khaled would voluntarily travel to his country of citizenship, the PPA would allow him to re-enter Estonia with a valid visa. Khaled accepted the terms.

Khaled's case provides an example of the negotiation and subversion which Könönen (2021) contends is often missing from ethnographic accounts of detention. Instead, scholars tend to '[privilege] a suffering subject as an object of analysis', leaving little room for agency or complexity (Könönen 2021: 632). This is partly due to fieldwork constraints: researchers rarely have the kind of immersive, long-term access to detention institutions that would reveal more subtle dynamics. My fieldwork in Metsa had similar limitations. However, my engagement with Khaled's case was sustained and personal despite my controlled access to Metsa. While visiting and following his detention, Khaled and I became friends; I advocated for his release and provided access to outside contacts. Through this engagement, I was able to observe something rarely reported: a successful case of detainee negotiation and resistance.

I contend that Khaled's success was also linked to an institutional vulnerability

stemming from Metsa's contradictory function as a place of both migrant assistance and confinement which lay outside criminal law. The ambiguity and inconsistency embedded in these practices, while stressful to detainees, can also lead to situations where protest, resistance, and negotiation become tactical choices via which detainees gain leverage and find opportunities. Khaled's hunger strike was potent not just because of his disobedience, but because his protest was visceral and visible to outsiders. His actions had the potential to imperil the balance of power in Metsa, piercing the veil of secrecy shrouding the institution. In other words, Khaled exploited the contradiction of punitive protection, challenging officers to defend their practices from outside scrutiny. The pressure of possible media attention and investigation from human rights organisations placed Metsa's guards in a defensive position.

## BENEVOLENT CONFINEMENT: A CONVERSATION WITH THE PPA

After visiting the Metsa Detention Centre for six months, the PPA informed me that social visitors (i.e., anyone other than lawyers or diplomatic representatives) would no longer be allowed to enter the facility. This increased suspicion was prompted by the release of a written legal analysis of Metsa, authored by a refugee law clinic in mid-2018. That analysis was critical of Estonia's approach to detention and recommended reforms in line with EU human rights law. The two lawyers who authored this report had visited Metsa as part of a research project. Upon reading this analysis via the law clinic's website, the police expressed concern that other visitors could harm the reputation of the PPA as an institution.

In response, the PPA called three frequent visitors to Metsa (including myself) for a group interview at Tallinn's PPA headquarters. The PPA was interested in understanding our motivations and gauging if we could be trusted to continue our visits. In the section below, I highlight excerpts from this interview[6] because I found their responses so intriguing: officers put immense effort into justifying detention as a necessary, neutral, and even benevolent practice. Indeed, at one point, the officers claimed their involvement in detention cases remained circumstantial, insisting that these hinged entirely on judicial motions. Metsa staff were only there to enforce these motions and ensure the safety of migrants in custody. Who could be opposed to that?

> Officer 2: 'Estonia is not detaining people because they want to detain people. It's insane if you claim that we have a centre in [Metsa] and the personal agenda of the centre, the personal agenda of the police, is to keep the house full. It's not the case!'
>
> Officer 1: 'There are two different legal statuses there—do you understand that? You are speaking all the time about asylum seekers. But there are also illegal immigrants. Do you understand? They are different.'
>
> Visitor 2: 'Yes, but none of them are there for crimes—it's not on a criminal basis, otherwise they would be in prison.'
>
> Officer 2: 'That's very correct, none of the guys are there for a crime. That's why they are not punished! Detention is *not* applied as a punishment.'
>
> Visitor 1: 'But it is being perceived as a punishment by the people who are there—
>
> Officer 2: '—very many things have been perceived as a punishment.'

Visitor 1: '—And again, this is my personal opinion, when I see and speak to these people, I also feel that this is unjust treatment, that it's punishment.'

Officer 2: 'Of course! Because they are detained, of course they don't like it. [But] if you read the points regarding detention, then I'm sure you do know why detention is applied in these cases… You use the term punishment, which is completely incorrect in terms of the law.'

Officer 1: '…So for you, an asylum seeker and an illegal immigrant, there is no difference?'

Visitor 2: 'No, there is a legal difference. I would just prefer if they could wait at home for the decision of the judge or for deportation.'

This exchange felt like a distillation of the divergence in perspective between guards and detainees. For the officers, there were obvious, objective categories underpinning the practice of detention. Officers took great pains to distinguish between these categories. The detainees could not truly be experiencing a punishment, since detention was categorically not a punitive institution. To think otherwise was irrational and 'emotional'—a failure of intellect. The experience of these categories did not seem relevant to the officers.

The phrasing in our discussion effectively inverted the terminology of my informants. While Khaled, Ranbir, and Omar experienced punishment, imprisonment, and manipulation under the guise of 'assistance', the officers perceived assistance as misconstrued as 'punishment'. The officers admitted that detention was rarely a pleasant experience, yet they bristled at the notion that it could be unjust or traumatic. After all, punishment was the realm of criminal law—how could they be 'criminalising' migrants under administrative law?

At one point, the officials mused that our social visits might be manipulating detainees, giving them 'false hope' for their asylum applications or their chances of legalising their stay. Because the detainees were under state protection, the PPA argued that visitors could overstep ethical boundaries by offering personal support or advice. By indulging their emotions, the officers contended that we were risking detainee safety and wellbeing, contributing to insubordination or unrealistic expectations.

Officer 2: 'But as I understand it, if you go there [to Metsa], and they express their feelings, then obviously they expect something. If not based on fact, then emotionally. If you go there, and you gain their trust, don't you think that they would have false expectations regarding their future? If they have some questions regarding the legal perspective? And if you're not legal counsellors, then you cannot give them an adequate answer.'

The rhetoric of immigration detention—while ostensibly bureaucratic and benign—often 'infantilises' detainees, assuming them to be incapable of speaking for themselves, enacting change, or comprehending their circumstances (Gómez Cervantes et al. 2017: 269). I was reminded of this sentiment as officers spoke of the need to 'protect' detainees from visitors, even when detainees advocated for outside support. The broader implication was that detainees required protection *from themselves*, lest their emotions and desires lead them astray by contradicting state guidance. In effect, the officers argued that detainees could not be trusted to know what was best for them.

Our conversation later turned to the content of the law clinic's report. The officers argued that the report was inflammatory in tone and lacking context:

Officer 2: 'If I would be—if I install myself in a regular citizen's shoes… now I'm gonna read the report, and I have a picture about Estonian police and also the detention applied, etc. And with those short facts, the picture I must say, is wrong. And the picture is destabilising, in which way of how I feel for the police. Do I trust my country? Do I trust the authorities?… If you present emotions in the same pot as the facts, or non-based facts, then it's a problem. If you say that, yes, from your perspective, it's very sad to have people there put into isolation for punishment. OK, then who does that and for what reason? It's not shown here. Of course there are isolation cells!'

'…If I would be the guy who was detained in the isolation cell, and if you would be the person that [is] coming to see me in Metsa, of course, 9 cases out of 10, would be the case where I would say, "yeah, you know, I didn't do anything. Those guys, they're the bad police, the cops came, and then they dragged me to the isolation cell."'

Visitor 1: 'But that's a problem if people say that, because that means-'

Officer 2: *[laughing]* 'Oh-ho-ho! Yeah, yeah!'

Visitor 1: 'That means that either they have not been explained what happened, or, of course it can happen that they disagree with it, but also this kind of "somebody came and dragged me", this is a very problematic narrative. For me, it indicates that people have not been given a good explanation.'

Officer 2: '… If you are going on that kind of very emotional matter, you know, detaining somebody, or isolating, or whatever, there are always emotions involved. So, to base an article or even somebody's opinion only on emotions, it's not completely trustworthy or objective. …It's like Donald Trump says; it's fake news! Do you agree with me?'

De Genova (2017: 161), in a conceptual discussion of migrant 'detainability', argues that one of the most compelling facets of detention is 'naturalisation' or 'depoliticisation' as a tool of law enforcement. During this interview, I was interested to hear Metsa's officers discuss detention in this context, framing the practice as essential for the wellbeing of citizens and migrants alike. Solitary confinement was also naturalised as a disciplinary measure: my informants in detention viewed solitary confinement as cruel and traumatic, yet the officers spoke about this practice in aloof, paternalistic terms. Moreover, Officer 2 claimed that individuals had requested isolation in the past, framing solitary confinement as something that could be desirable for detainees in certain circumstances—perhaps even necessary for their protection:

Officer 2: 'Just to give you another parallel issue regarding that: there are quite a few cases where persons have demanded to be isolated because they don't want to stay with other people. So, if you don't have the facts and background, it's a bit difficult.'

Despite my disagreements with them, my aim in this section was not to ethically judge the

officers, but rather to juxtapose their understanding of detention conditions against the experiences of my informants. The officers' words framed Metsa as a space of seemingly incompatible functions—simultaneously invoking the rhetoric of discipline, national security, and migrant protection. They described detainees in terms that were both paternalistic and personal, claiming access to exclusive knowledge that contradicted the prejudiced, 'emotional', and conspiratorial views of my informants. The intensity of these contradictions parallels what my informants experienced in detention, providing a new perspective on the paradox I describe as 'punitive protection'.

## CONCLUSIONS

European Union regulations outline immigration detention as an administrative measure that should function as a last resort to prevent unlawful border crossings and facilitate deportations (Council of the European Union 2008). In Estonia, as in the rest of the EU, detention is legally and politically distinct from any form of criminal punishment. Yet, these categories can blur together in practice; many migration scholars (e.g., Bosworth 2017; Jukka Könönen 2019; Nicolas DeGenova 2021; Griffiths 2013) have approached detention as an enigmatic institution where migrants experience criminalisation through informal processes. I observed this process in Metsa: Omar, Ranbir, and Khaled had not committed a crime—a fact that facility guards were keen to remind them of—yet my informants faced long-term confinement and social isolation.

In addition to this contradiction between the form and function of detention, a deeper irony was palpable in the interactions between Metsa staff and detainees. At stake was not just deportation, but the authenticity of day-to-day life. Again and again, officials insisted that my informants were overreacting, misunderstanding, and mistaking benevolence for malfeasance. I watched as my informants' beliefs, sensations, and experiences were denied or disbelieved by officers. These processes lent Metsa a surreal, psychologically intense atmosphere. Entering the site felt like stepping into a crucible of stress, paranoia, and competing realities. Questions and ambiguities swirled through my fieldwork conversations. I struggled to make sense of what I was observing.

In this article, I have proposed a term I argue encapsulates this tension: *punitive protection*. 'Punitive protection' reflects the paradox that my informants in Metsa encountered; it describes the space between what they were *told* and what they *knew*. Punitive protection is potentiated by the ambiguity of detention law and experienced at a visceral level in Metsa's corridors.

My interview with the PPA allowed me to observe punitive protection from a different perspective. Officers described detention as a necessary service that supervises and manages care for undocumented migrants. This 'care', however, included 'arranging' migrant deportations and 'protecting' them from outside visitors. In our discussions, PPA officers purported to speak on behalf of detainees, assuring me that the state was acting in their best interest—whether they realised it or not. The afflictive experience of detention was irrelevant; the officers I spoke to contended that any rhetoric of punishment or imprisonment was an overreaction or delusion of detainees.

I left my fieldwork believing that detention takes a terrible toll on all involved. The informants from Metsa I am still in contact with complain of lingering trauma: nightmares, flashbacks, and paranoia intrude upon their daily routines, even when the risk of deportation has subsided. Yet, their suffering was not the

full story: each of my informants grasped the paradox of punitive protection and responded in various ways. Omar and Ranbir viewed the institution as an absurdity, challenging and contradicting guards in conversation. Khaled found a weakness in the ambiguous, informal nature of detention, using his body as a mode of resistance and working to attract attention from outside groups. All three described their experiences in terms beyond dispossession, articulating a disorienting tension that shaped life in Metsa.

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## NOTES

1 Refer to the Estonian Penal Code sections §2374 and §258.
2 This can occur when different reasons for detention are given for each term. For example, someone could serve one 18-month detention term for 'identification' and another term as a 'security risk'.
3 BJP is an abbreviation for the *Bharatiya Janata Party*, the political party led by Narendra Modi.
4 The Dublin agreement requires that asylum seekers remain in the EU country where they first apply for protection. If they leave this initial country of entry, the Dublin regulations create a justification for their deportation back from within the EU.
5 In rare cases, migrants can serve multiple detention terms if their status changes. Each detention term must have a separate justification given by the PPA, such as flight risk, lack of identification, security risk, etc.
6 This conversation was conducted in English and recorded with permission from all parties taking part in the meeting. All quotes are verbatim, although lightly edited for clarity.

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# PROTEST IN THE FACE OF CATASTROPHE: EXTINCTION REBELLION AND THE ANTI-POLITICS OF GRIEF

## INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF GRIEF

Extinction Rebellion (XR) is a global environmental movement originating in the UK in 2018, which seeks to use nonviolent civil disobedience to protest government inaction on the current ecological crisis and the catastrophic prospects of abrupt anthropogenic climate change. The bleak inventory of catastrophic prospects includes rising sea levels, crop failures, extreme weather, melting ice caps and permafrost, burning forests, and the systematic destruction of whole ecosystems. In an ever-expanding body of academic and popular literature dedicated to this breakdown, visions of a future collapse abound, consisting of mass migration, starvation and extinction, the depletion of resources, war and fascism, chronic water shortages, stifling pollution and vast areas of the Earth rendered literally uninhabitable (see Wallace-Wells 2019). Compared to earlier more single-issue and optimistic environmental groups, XR was founded on communicating the catastrophic severity of the climate breakdown, especially the ongoing species extinction from which it derives its name. XR stresses the imperative of taking urgent action *before it is too late*, and its official three demands commonly supported by all in the movement are *Tell the Truth*, *Act Now* and *Beyond Politics* (establish a Citizens' Assembly for climate justice).

Since XR burst onto the political scene in November 2018 followed by successive 'rebellions' in April and October 2019, a range of insightful academic studies have focused on the movement. Important elements of XR have been analysed: from their internal project of 'regenerative culture' (Westwell and Bunting 2020) to XR's horizontal organisation and 'fantasy of leaderlessness' (Fotaki and Foroughi 2021), the movement's similarities to early Christian millenarianism in prioritising existential vulnerability (Joyce 2020) and its relationship to political millenarianism more generally (Skrimshire 2019). Andreas Malm (2021) amongst others, has also subjected the movement to a thorough critique, focusing on XR's claim to be 'Beyond Politics', its strategy of nonviolent disruption its theorisation of the fossil economy, as well as the movement being 'persistently aloof from factors of class and race' (Malm 2021:126).

Taking these perceptive contributions into consideration, in this article I attempt to provide a comprehensive anthropological account of the movement as a whole, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork to demonstrate what is substantially taking place within the movement at the level of activists' own motivations, beliefs, and objectives. I attempt to ethnographically show how XR actually functions, demonstrating how within the movement there is a novel and distinct project to generate a new kind of subjectivity stemming from the work of mourning and grief. In this article I seek to shed anthropological light on this project as part of a broader investigation into how XR activists construct,

sustain and practice doomsaying subjectivities orientated towards catastrophe and what forms of protest and politics arise from this specific approach to climate breakdown.

The ethnographic detail within this article is derived from fieldwork that took place from late August until mid-October 2019 mainly in the city of York in Northern England. The fieldwork comprised participating in weekly meetings, demonstrations and a workshop, as well as conducting interviews. I also took part in two major 'rebellions', which bookended my fieldwork. The first was the more carnivalesque 'Northern Rebellion' in Manchester spanning the weekend of 30th August through 2nd September 2019. The second was the 'International Rebellion' in London which lasted two weeks from 7th to 21th October 2019.

The centrality of grief, of mourning for the loss of both nature and the future—which will be the focus of this article—was apparent right from the beginning of my fieldwork during the first interview I conducted in early September 2019 with a veteran activist called Luke.[1] Towards the end of a long and emotional discussion about the prospects of climate catastrophe, and reflecting on his position that the human species is bound for extinction, he stated *'grief is a thing that pervades me, pervades what I do'*. This in principle stands for the movement overall. Grief, paramount above other feelings of anger, despair, or guilt, is the mobilising and sustaining emotional force that creates XR activists, determining their subjective dispositions and binding them together through a shared project in opposition to catastrophe. Grief for XR activists is a force that stimulates action in the world as an answer to despair and is embraced as an emotion which reveals the truth of climate catastrophe. In this article I argue that the ongoing work of grief, beneath the often mischaracterising public image of XR as

disruptive and eccentric, is what is *substantially* taking place within the movement.

## EXTINCTION REBELLION ACTIVISTS AS DOOMSAYERS

In this section I explore how doomsaying characterises the fundamental orientation and method of activists; what they do and who they are as activists who *Tell the Truth* and demand governments to *Act Now*. In what follows I distinguish between doomsaying and grief. If doomsaying describes activists' particular *structural* orientation towards the future—their temporal relationship to catastrophe—grief is the emotional *substance* or force which is the content of this orientation—the emotion activists use to construct their subjectivities and performatively express through protest. Hence doomsaying is a general category describing an orientation towards the future which recognises it as catastrophic and necessary to avoid. Whereas grief is specific to XR activists as the basis of their subjectivity and the substance of their particular form of doomsaying. Whilst doomsaying is a description most activists would not use for themselves, it is utilised in this article because it is implicit in activists' self-descriptions as being 'humanity's conscience', and the Earth's 'fire alarm' or 'panic button'.

A doomsayer is a person who, energised with prophetic knowledge in an otherwise ignorant or evasive age, makes gloomy predictions about a catastrophic future in the hope of stirring others from negligence, denial, and disavowal into action taken in the urgent present in order to avoid the doom foretold. XR's first and second demands of *Tell the Truth* and *Act Now* reflect this. Activists unanimously declared during fieldwork that their role was not to offer an alternative vision of the future, but to raise awareness about the severity of the climate

Fig. 1. The Earth Flag at the Northern Rebellion, Manchester (01/09/19)

catastrophe and to prompt action in order to avoid the worst of it. This echoes their own contention that the movement is at root *Beyond Politics*, protesting a crisis the severity of which transcends ordinary politics, demanding a new form of mobilisation which is not only social or political, but also psychic and spiritual. Grief, as we shall see, is vital to this. Firstly, however, I will illustrate how doomsaying temporally structures activists' grieving subjectivities.

The primary goal of doomsaying is to make the future tangibly real (Dupuy 2015). For activists this is achieved through an emotive and apostolic anti-politics of grief.[2] I use apostolic to refer to a type of protest based on the righteous repetition of the truth and the demand for action in opposition to 'business-as-usual'. As I will

further demonstrate in the 'Conclusion', XR's politics is actually an anti-politics, an outlook through which political problems are translated into emotive-ethical issues of subjectivity, with politics situated as an obstacle to transcend and move 'beyond'. This apostolic anti-politics necessarily involves a vagueness about 'practical' solutions since it seeks first and foremost a change in consciousness or subjectivity. The apostle or prophet restates their message of truth through an emotional call to action rather than a 'rational' attempt to persuade.

For an XR activist, to speak the truth of climate breakdown, to acknowledge its full severity and communicate its urgent reality is a radical act in a world that is in denial. For instance, a pamphlet widely distributed at the

International Rebellion titled 'Why We Rebel' declares: 'We face a breakdown of all life, the tragedy of tragedies: the unhallowed horror' (Extinction Rebellion 2019b: 3). This language is specifically catastrophist since 'unhallowed' here signifies not a revelatory apocalypse, but rather a catastrophe devoid of overarching meaning, or as the philosopher Günther Anders (2019 [1959]) put it in reference to nuclear annihilation, 'Apocalypse without Kingdom'. I specifically use catastrophe because of its simplicity, defined by the philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy (2015: 34) as 'the occurrence of an abrupt discontinuity in a system characterised by continuous dynamics'. This distinction between apocalypse and catastrophe corresponds to the difference between millenarianism and doomsaying. XR activists are not millenarians because whilst millenarians perceive in disaster the promise of eschatological revelation and salvation, doomsayers invoke catastrophe precisely to avoid it as an 'unhallowed horror.'

Most activists understand this 'unhallowed horror' as one of slow collapse and decay, not a single event, but a process of accelerating decline driven on by ecological tipping points and feedback loops (see Wallace-Wells 2019). As Luke, who has been in the environmental movement since the 1980s and who is immersed in the scientific forecasts put it to me:

> It is like standing in a flooded house with the water slowly rising. It reaches to your waist gradually, so you think you have the time to escape. But what you don't realise is that the next rise in the water level will be exponential, reach your head, and drown you… The trouble with the exponential function is that you can only understand it after it's happened!

Here Luke demonstrates the difficulty in conceptualising climate catastrophe as both an ongoing process and a prospect in the future. Conceptualising catastrophe through doomsaying involves generating a different perception of time, which encourages a sense of historical responsibility. This often involves moving from a linear to a reciprocal perception, whereby the past, present, and future are understood as interdependent. The pamphlet emphasises this through the idea of the stewardship of the planet: 'Each generation is given two things: one is the gift of the world, and the other is the duty of keeping it safe for those to come' (Extinction Rebellion 2019b: 5). As Luke also put it, in a foreshadowing tone expressed by many activists, 'I think that on my gravestone, if there is one, I would like it if someone wrote, "*he tried to be a responsible ancestor*"'. Luke's eco-centric stewardship, a product of interpreting the climate science through an approach called 'Deep Adaptation', means he does 'not have any hope for the human race'. As he put it, 'For me success would be leaving a habitable planet for whatever organisms succeed us'. Whether eco-centric or anthropocentric, this feeling of historical responsibility and ecological stewardship is constitutive of many XR activists' subjectivities and symptomatic of an intimacy with catastrophe, a close and sometimes all-too-immediate orientation towards the future.

In summary, a reciprocal notion of time that connects past, present, and future into an interdependent bond draws the subject into a conscious process of living responsibly through history. Dupuy (2015: 7) argues that through this model of reciprocal time in doomsaying, 'the present preserves the memory of [future suffering], as it were, as a result of the mind's having projected itself into the time following the catastrophe, conceiving of the event in the future perfect tense'. Doomsaying imaginatively

Fig. 2. Posters at the Northern Rebellion, Manchester (01/09/19)

places the catastrophe into the 'horizon of expectation' (Koselleck 2004), transforming it into a tangible prospect in order to stir action to avoid it. Therefore, catastrophe paradoxically exists as 'something that is fated to happen, but at the same time is contingent and accidental, something that might not happen' (Dupuy 2015: 8).

This process involves a striking intensification of the present, imbued as it is with the

urgency to *Act Now*. As the pamphlet puts it in an epic style typical of the movement:

> History is calling from the future, a hundred years from now…Calling the conscience of humanity to act with the fierce urgency of now…we have just this one flickering instant to hold the winds of the world in our hands, to vouchsafe the future (Extinction Rebellion, 2019b:3).

Here history is presented as an agent, summoning subjects to act decisively and fatefully in an intense present. This is a specific feeling doomsaying attempts to generate. For instance, during the Northern Rebellion an activist called Ed described the sensation that sitting down in the middle of Deansgate, Manchester gave him, as a 'strange experience of consciously living through history'. Looking at the department store Kendals (now House of Fraser), which he often visited as a child, but now from the perspective of the street where traffic should be flowing, he described it as 'one of those moments when you cast away the veil of society as it is and you get a glimpse of something else even though you don't know what it is…you see the tantalising prospect of a better world.' This becoming aware, energised, and empowered in certain key moments of revelation is a theme common in the movement, signifying a distinct temporal subject experience of activism in XR, of living in and through an accelerating historical transformation, with the hope of also *making* history too.

As such, XR activists are sensitively orientated towards a catastrophic future ever more encroaching into the present. Yet anthropology itself—as Nancy Munn (1992) established—is itself decidedly not orientated towards the future and has traditionally 'viewed the future in 'shreds and patches' in contrast to the close attention given to 'the past in the present'' (Munn 1992: 115–116). Excepting perhaps the anthropology of millenarianism (see Worsley 1957), a specific 'anthropology of the future' is seemingly absent from the discipline's history. Rebecca Bryant and Daniel M. Knight's *The Anthropology of the Future* (2019) goes some way towards correcting this historical evasion by providing a comprehensive overview of the work of anthropologists specifically concerned with futural issues in the past 30 years, whilst

also drawing eclectically on modern European philosophy for theories of temporality. Whilst their emphasis on historical and temporal 'orientations' is useful, their work—perhaps reflecting the wider poverty of anthropological treatments of *environmental* futures—pays little attention to the issue of a climactically catastrophic future. Notably, 'ecology' merits only a fleeting mention in the introduction (Bryant and Knight 2019: 10–11). In response to perhaps a lack of anthropological attention towards climate breakdown and the future, I draw on philosophical and psychoanalytical sources from outside the discipline to analyse how XR activists live in relation to a specifically *catastrophic* future. Indeed, the unprecedented nature of XR's activism and outlook demand such a synthetic approach which can put conceptualisations of catastrophe, doomsaying, grief, and anti-politics into fruitful dialogue with close ethnographic investigation.

As such, building on this use of Dupuy's theory of doomsaying to analyse XR activists' orientation towards the future, in what follows I explore how grief animates this doomsaying and how the work of mourning subjectivizes this experience of living through and in opposition to catastrophe. To do this, I must first turn to the ideological heterogeneity within the movement and demonstrate how the importance of grief within XR stems from the work of the American New Age intellectual Joanna Macy.

## INTELLECTUAL CURRENTS WITHIN THE MOVEMENT AND THE CENTRALITY OF NEW AGE THOUGHT

Whilst XR may appear homogenous due to its simple core message and clear aesthetic, the movement is, however, internally differentiated and characterised by an ideological and

Fig. 3. The Extinction Rebellion 'Angel of the North' made from recycled rubbish materials. Here it is in the middle of Deansgate at the Northern Rebellion, Manchester. 'Kendals' (now House of Fraser) is the building on the right. (01/09/19)

organisational amorphousness (see Harding 2020). XR possesses a highly horizontal and decentralised structure, allowing 'affinity groups' of six to twelve activists to independently plan nonviolent protest actions. The movement also has no formal membership requirement and eschews any official or elected leaders. This organisational fluidity, combined with a pacifist discipline and a simple doomsaying practice (meaning activists do not have a set of policies upon which they might disagree), enables XR to remain a broad, yet effective alliance of different influences, ideologies, and styles. Nevertheless, XR can be cogently broken down into three main strands: Deep Adaptation theory, social justice, and the New Age. These strands do not represent fixed groups, but are rather key intellectual 'currents' which influence the attitudes, strategies, and outlooks of different activists.

Firstly, Deep Adaptation is a minor intellectual current derived from the work of British environmental theorist Jem Bendell, currently Professor of Sustainability Leadership at the University of Cumbria. Bendell (2019) presents his theory as one that takes the scientific predictions regarding abrupt climate change seriously and, therefore, expects imminent ecological and social collapse within the next ten years. Bendell (2019: 75) concludes that any notion of preventing collapse is actually a form of denial, arguing that collective efforts at this point should be directed towards preparation and adaptation both emotionally and practically for a disaster that will mean 'an uneven ending of our normal modes of sustenance, security, pleasure, identity, meaning, and hope'.

This argument entails a spiritual emphasis which links the theory to New Age ideas, typically expressed in a common quasi-Buddhist idiom of living in the present and severing any attachment to material illusions. Luke aligns himself very explicitly with Deep Adaptation and told me that he took inspiration from a quote he had heard: 'When hope dies, action begins'. He wryly joked that hope was really 'hopeium', a fantasy that he realised, looking back over 30 years of activism, he had been spreading. Speaking about his Deep Adaptationist outlook on the future as he explained what would accompany each increase in the Earth's average temperature, he said:

> I actually feel like a failure. The activism I have done has all been very worthy but it hasn't been successful…We are now firing lead shot into this dying body [failing ecosystem]…I don't actually have any hope for the human race…If I have any hope at all it's that extreme thermophile bacteria will go 'Yippie!'

Largely opposed to Deep Adaptation is the social justice current that is the most recognisable model of transformation, stemming as it does from a post-1968 politics of identity, anti-capitalism, consciousness raising and liberation. Capitalism and colonialism are identified as the source of climate catastrophe and the current employs a language of solidarity, struggle, class, race, gender, and populism largely absent from the other two currents, emphasising climate justice as social and political justice. Emily, a student activist, explicitly disagreed with the Deep Adaptationists arguing that 'they very much sensationalise the science, they are not based in reality…and their research is questionable.' Politically she stressed both that their 'scientistic' discourse does not emotionally connect with the general public and that their advocacy of adaptation is tantamount to surrender, doing nothing for those already experiencing catastrophe in the Global South. As she put it, 'it is a position of privilege to say, *woe is me, everything sucks*!'

Fig. 4. A poster at Northern Rebellion, Manchester (01/09/19)

Whilst Emily represents the most politically recognisable approach within the movement, it is the New Age current that serves as the *intellectual* backbone of XR. Indeed, the fundamental premise that subjects must grieve the loss entailed by climate catastrophe in order to psychically process it and act purposefully in the world comes from the work of American New Age theorist Joanna Macy. Macy, whose name circulates widely within the movement, is an environmentalist intellectual whose work blends deep ecology,

Buddhism, and systems theory (Macy and Johnstone 2012). Her approach to grief has been enthusiastically incorporated into XR in the form of 'regenerative culture'. Regenerative culture is concerned with fostering an alternative caring culture both within and outside XR, based on renewing consciousness and social relations through emotional openness, empathy, resilience, and holistic awareness (see Westwell and Bunting 2020). Grief activates this project because, as Macy puts it, 'By choosing to honour the pain of loss rather than discounting it, we break the spell that numbs us to the dismantling of our world.' (Macy and Johnstone 2012: 79). Macy's influence is most directly manifested in 'The Work That Reconnects' workshops, one of which I attended during my fieldwork. These workshops, developed from earlier 'Despair and Empowerment' workshops which Macy ran from the late 1970s onwards, are organisationally separate from XR, but frequently attended by activists. I describe the workshop in which I participated in the next section. As a first step, however, Macy's approach must be placed within its intellectual context.

The New Age movement is a highly fluid and eclectic social and historical formation. Nevertheless, it can be analysed through several key attributes. In a syncretic style it blends humanism, individualism, romanticism, and spiritualism articulated in a language of psychic liberation focused on the 'inner frontier of change' (Macy and Johnstone 2012: 32). It is anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, and typically expressed through the lapsarian premise that humans have become alienated from an original state of symbiotic harmony with nature. The sociologist Paul Heelas (1996) argues convincingly that New Age thinking opposes the corrupted and contaminated *socialised self* under systems of oppression against the free, true and authentic *inner self*. Thus social

transformation is a case of *returning* to our innate selves.

Macy's New Age approach is formulated through two arguments: a metaphor of toxicity that articulates the *problems* of 'the system' and the transformation of consciousness as the *solution* to these problems. Contemporary global capitalism—'the system' or 'business-as-usual'—is toxic because it not only pollutes the Earth, but is psychically toxic too. Toxicity signifies a decapacitating build-up of distressing emotions such as panic, anxiety, grief, confusion, dread, and despair which have no outlet in the toxic culture of denial and disavowal produced by the fossil economy. As Macy and Johnstone (2012: 2) put it, 'This blocked communication generates a peril even more deadly, for the greatest danger of our times is the deadening of our response.'. They continue, 'this is where we begin—by acknowledging that our times confront us with realities that are painful to face, difficult to take in and confusing to live with.' (Macy and Johnstone 2012: 2).

In this approach, the climate catastrophe is a psychic crisis and as such, only through transforming the psyche or the self can we hope to change the material world. Indeed, Heelas argues that for New Age thought, 'the inner realm, and the inner realm alone, is held to serve as the source of authentic vitality, creativity, love, tranquillity, wisdom, power, authority, and all those other qualities which are held to comprise the perfect life' (Heelas 1996: 19). Whilst this explanation is too formulaic, it nevertheless identifies the centrality of consciousness shifting to the New Age. This was made ethnographically clear to me at an XR rally in Russell Square, London, during the International Rebellion. In the pouring rain and after a long march, the crowd congregated for a final gathering. A speaker took the stage and immediately declared 'This is the Great Turning

Joanna Macy talks about! Look at you all! You are all so amazing, vital, beautiful!' She went on, saying:

> We have the sacred seeds for a world transformation. The seeds of the future lie in grief. We have to grieve first…Let that grief fill you up and guide you…It is life speaking to us…This is what consciousness evolving looks like!

The activist's speech lucidly illustrates what I seek to stress here: that grief and consciousness are fundamental to XR's model of social transformation. This is a model whereby subjectivity serves as the vehicle for transformation, as the site of agentive and mobilising emotional truth. I will explore this translation of political and social issues into spiritual and emotive problems in the Conclusion through the concept of anti-politics. To summarise, XR's doomsaying subjectivity that is created through the generation of grief-as-truth is only possible through this New Age prioritisation of consciousness raising. The following section will ethnographically explore this process of generating subjectivity through grief.

## SUBJECTIVITY AND THE WORK THAT RECONNECTS

'The Work That Reconnects' workshop is best described as a therapeutic retreat for activists who are personally distressed by climate catastrophe and intellectually curious about the philosophy behind regenerative culture. The workshop took place over five hours on a Sunday in September 2019 at a small conference centre in York. Its purpose was not to strategically instruct or educate activists, but instead to both expand their consciousness and relieve their distress. It was structured as a five-part 'spiral' devised by Macy, beginning with *Coming from Gratitude* to *Honouring Our Pain for the World*, *Seeing with New Eyes*, and finishing with *Going Forth*. This structure was explained by the co-facilitators through the metaphor of a plant, depicted from root to flower on a whiteboard in the room. These co-facilitators, a young man and woman, were officially external to XR and trained in Joanna Macy's approach. They were part of The Work That Reconnects Network, an organisation of trained activists with its own online journal, *Deep Times*.[3] Macy was of singular importance as the intellectual inspiration of this workshop; we were encouraged to browse through her books and at one point we all read out passages from the book *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy* (2012), the text cited in this article.

We began the workshop with all of us (15 in total) sitting in a large airy room in a wide circle, one by one expressing what we were grateful for in life, what gave us inspiration and why we were there. Examples of inspirational sources consisted of fellow activists, the kindness of others and the pleasure of chatting with friends. The beauty of the Yorkshire landscape was inspirational for one woman, whilst others expressed their gratitude for the company of animals, the energy of the sun and Mother Earth. From the beginning the mood was contemplative; the co-facilitators talked slowly and calmly, smiling and nodding peacefully. Most of the activists seemed very comfortable and familiar with this emotional expression and freely shared their thoughts. This segment was followed by a mindfulness breathing exercise which was to be repeated throughout the day between the different activities, on the basis of providing relief after the emotional intensity of each exercise.

Fig. 5. Funeral march, Oxford Street, London (12/10/19)

We then moved into the *Honouring Our Pain for the World* section, which concentrates on the work of mourning. We were told by the co-facilitators to begin slowly 'milling' around the room, silently passing each other, becoming aware of our proximity to one another and the atmosphere of the space. We were then told to stop and pair up with the person closest to us, stand opposite one another, and maintain gentle eye contact. This was repeated five times. The first three times, the co-facilitators read out elements of our collective loss: the loss of ecosystems like the Amazon rainforest, extinct animal species, murdered environmental activists, and the loss of a safe future. In the last two pairs I was a part of, we had to interact and share both our worries and our hopes for the future. These included both the personal and the political as worries about flooding houses and local air pollution were mentioned alongside fears about a global descent into fascism and hesitant hopes that a more equal society might emerge from the crisis if XR was successful.

We again performed a mindfulness exercise, and many let out deep sighs, some cried, and others exchanged quiet hugs. The atmosphere was contemplative, peaceful, and ameliorative. There was an acute sense of a common fragility and sensitivity being shared in a mutually appreciative space. These were activists of differing experiences, ages and levels of commitment brought together by a shared distress. The expression of this distress engendered a palpable atmosphere of relief, the efficacy of which appeared to rest in the simple act of publically verbalising loss rather than any interrogation of it. Arguably then, the session, particularly in the *Honouring Our Pain for the World* section, possessed a dynamic analogous to group therapy, whereby catharsis can be achieved through the process of free emotional expression, as others bear empathetic witness to this affective outflow.[4]

After the lunch break, the *Seeing with New Eyes* section began and was orientated towards

an expansion of historical consciousness. A 'time travel' exercise involved us pairing up again: one person was to imagine themselves as a member of the current generation speaking to the other, an ambassador of the seventh generation in the future. Here the co-facilitators invoked Native American historical consciousness as more enlightened than Western historical irresponsibility, telling us how, before making a collective decision, the Haudenosaunee of North America consider the possible effects the current generation may have on the seventh generation (Macy and Johnstone 2012). During this exercise, my partner spoke to me as a member of this seventh generation, and expressed his apologies and regret that I had to survive in a wasteland because of *his* generation's actions. The clear aim of this section was to encourage in activists a reciprocal conception of time whereby each generation inherits the Earth as a sacred gift, imagining 'a crowd of ancestors cheering us on in all that we do to ensure [that] the flow of life continues' (Macy and Johnstone 2012: 152).

Following this, the tone of the workshop became more pragmatic, culminating in the final *Going Forth* section. This section's title signifies a distinction between the realm of the workshop, everyday life, and activist struggle. It prompted activists to translate the understandings they had reached in the workshop into the two other spheres of life. Here through working out literal 'to-do lists' with our partners, we concretely speculated on how we planned to translate what we had learnt during the workshop into our everyday lives and the activist struggle. For instance, my partner and I discussed getting more involved in XR and the inspirational potential of being in nature or creating art that we both agreed we ought to draw upon more often.

After this we finished by thanking the co-facilitators. There was a discernible sense of affective peace and restoration. Yet what was noticeable as I chatted to other participants was how there was little or no conversation on how the workshop linked to the activist struggle. The language instead was emotional, personal and ethical, not political as it had been briefly in the lunch break. Speaking to four activists afterwards as part of a group interview, none of the interlocutors replied to my questions with their own explanations or criticisms of the workshop. Instead, they expressed unanimous affirmation at a workshop-well-done that did not require any sense of elaboration or reflection at that moment in time. Perhaps this was the workshop's success: being a space where activists were not interrogating and addressing themselves *as activists* but rather as suffering subjects first, as people who care and are overwhelmed. This detachment from the wider political struggle confirms the workshop as primarily therapeutic; the mood was one of relief, not determination. Therefore, whilst it was ethnographically difficult to assess whether the workshop engendered the promise of shifting consciousness, the communal expression of grief had generated a palpable therapeutic and ameliorative effect.

This process can be theoretically illuminated. The workshop's stated aim was that, by working through the process of mourning ecological loss and the loss of the future, activists will both attain a deeper level of consciousness and relieve their distress or 'burnout'. Psychoanalytically, this can be understood as 'breaking attachment to a dying planet' (Fletcher 2018). Importantly, Freud distinguished a process of healthy mourning—as a painful psychical working-out of the loss of the object of desire—from dysfunctional melancholia. Melancholia occurs when the subject cannot detach from the lost object. The desire preserved for it transforms into an

inward focused self-destructive drive, and the world around is drained of any possibility for pleasure, whilst the subject is preoccupied with their pain. For Freud (1984 [1917]: 262) this melancholia 'behaves like an open wound'. The subject's ego is depleted through self-reproach at this deteriorative process, all the while simultaneously disavowing the negative effects of this exhaustive and cyclical behaviour (see Fletcher 2018).

The Work That Reconnects aims to set up a *new* object of desire, that of a re-connected relationship between the subject, others, and nature: a regenerated whole. When Macy describes a movement from passive to active hope she is describing a passage of subject-making through the prism of mourning akin to Freud's ideal of grief and re-attachment (Macy and Johnstone 2012, Freud 1984 [1917]). The typical 'end-product' is a subject who is robust and adaptive, turned out towards the world and able to attach themselves to positive objects of desire that facilitate meaningful relationships. However, the comparison between psychoanalysis and the New Age ends here since catastrophe lends the work of mourning a radically different meaning, namely, a suspenseful *keeping with* the work of mourning rather than the goal of passing through it via gradual detachment. Hence the workshop was not about achieving a healthy state having entirely mourned the ecological loss. Here there is no Freudian passage *through* mourning when the work is done. Instead, there is the sense of having to keep with ecological grief as a process with no discernible end, as a loss all too total and incomprehensible to 'get over'. As Luke told me, invoking the famous Kübler-Ross model of grief,[5]

... acceptance isn't the end and then it's all alright. There is still difficult stuff going on,

lots of 'what-ifs' go through your mind…I deal with it by very much living in the moment. I know I could get knocked off my bike anytime or have a heart attack… But when you love life as much as I do it's very hard to think that it is all going to go to pot!

This ongoing *difficult stuff* is the *stuff* that XR activist subjectivity is made from. This is a specifically *suspenseful* subjectivity formed through a conscious keeping-with-grief, a continual turning over and contemplation of ecological loss, premised on a sensitive existential vulnerability, proof itself of an appropriate response to such a catastrophe. This project of maintaining a vulnerable psychic exposure to the reality of catastrophe involves an attempt to resist either being drawn back into disavowing normalisation or succumbing to burning out and becoming overwhelmed. Hence the demand of XR to *Tell the Truth*, to face the future seriously, without the comforting fantasies of disavowal or denial, to keep with mourning as that which authenticates and substantiates the truth of catastrophe.

This keeping-with-grief can be viewed as a response by XR to the unique incomprehensibility of ecological loss, to the spatial and temporal vastness of this loss that resists apprehension. The philosopher Alenka Zupančič (2018: 25) argues that it is only through the work of mourning that we actually create this lost object retrospectively: 'only at "the end" will we find out what exactly it was that we lost, in total'. She notes how 'Our apocalypse is a loss without the lost, a mourning that precedes the loss and actually creates it with its work (that of mourning). It is a mourning without object' (Zupančič 2018: 26). Ecological mourning then is precisely about a *creation* of the lost object as a corrective against obscuring normalisation.

Fig. 6. The red brigade leading the funeral march down Oxford Street, London (12/10/19)

Hence the function of the imaginative time travel exercise is the paradoxical attempt to retrospectively create the loss prior to it happening in totality, so as to comprehend it as an event and in the process be able to construct a doomsaying subjectivity in relation to it. Overall, the work of mourning is the constitutive process through which the XR *subject* and their *object* of climate catastrophe are formed in relation to each other.

In addition to this construction of subjectivity is its maintenance, manifested as the relief of burnout. Burnout is a phrase commonly used in the movement to indicate when an activist has over-worked. It also expresses a kind of over-exposure to troubling information about climate change and arguably involves an implicit temporal dimension. Many interlocutors expressed an anxiety about the latest scientific predictions regarding flooding, ice melt, extinction, crop failure, pollution and temperature rise. Indeed, this was also part of a wider anxiety about the political stakes of the contemporary juncture. As Emily put it, 'we are at a tipping point, either we can have this amazing transformative change or we can go through the climate crisis, eco-fascism, closing borders, population control and leaving the Global South to suffer…Yeah it's terrifying!' Underwriting these fears was a sense too of time running out or even a resignation that it was already too late. Luke's 'pervasive grief', triggered when he remembers '30 years of failure', or even Ed's optimistic 'strange experience of consciously living in history', entail a temporal intensity of subjective experience that can lead to burnout.

Burnout then is a claustrophobic combination of desperate hope, inertia and acceleration, a feeling that the doors of the future are closing in as the 'horizon of expectation' (Koselleck 2004) drains into

fate. Hence, 'the panic that climate change so easily induces is really a panic in the face of history' (Malm 2017: 8). As the late Lauren Berlant (2008: 6) put it, this feeling of being overwhelmed 'produces all kinds of neutralising affect management—coasting, skimming, browsing, distraction, apathy, coolness, counter-absorption, assessments of scales, picking one's fights and so on'. Mourning hopes to interrupt this by involving both a stepping out of the flow of time and an ensuing re-attachment to a differently qualified time with a new relation to the threat of the future. The workshop aimed to provide a space for the present *in of itself* then, as a corrective to a burnt-out passive present overwhelmed in the face of the future. Contemplative grief activates this 'feeling historical in the present' (Berlant 2008: 5). Time is re-imbued with potential as having cathartically expressed their painful feelings, activists could return to the maelstrom of a present pushed forward into the future with a sense of renewal and hope. Activists could re-vitalize themselves ready to step back into both the 'attritional' temporality of struggle and rapid temporality of protest. This is a paradox, crucial to the workshop, whereby the experience of time becomes more manageable through an intensification of the present.

In summary, burnout is a symptom of attempting to sustain a subjectivity vulnerably exposed to radical loss. In this sense then it is both caused and alleviated by the very process of subject-formation I have described. One is burnt-out because one cares so much and does so much. One is relieved only through a sensitive contemplation of *why* one cares. Burnout is the inevitable consequence of a subjectivity based on cultivated sensitivity to catastrophe. Perhaps the workshop is successful because it is not concerned with the pragmatic or political, but rather the psychic and the spiritual, as

energies are therapeutically concentrated into individual consciousness. In this sense activists can go back out into the fight as rejuvenated doomsayers. Having both subjectivized the truth of catastrophe through mourning and relieved their burnout they can return to protest, to performing their grief-as-truth.

## PROTEST, PERFORMATIVITY, AND AESTHETICS

In what follows I will seek to demonstrate how XR's form of protest is an apostolic doomsaying whereby the truth of climate catastrophe is demonstrated through the public performance of mourning. This highly aesthetic and theatrical form of protest seeks above all to generate an affective reaction, to stimulate feelings of responsibility, possibility, and inspiration.

The 'funeral march' (see Fig. 5.) that passed down Oxford Street during the International Rebellion in London 2019 will be taken as the ethnographic example to investigate XR's protest, performativity and aesthetics. As we marched down the wide road shouting various chants such as 'Whose planet? Our planet!', the rally suddenly came to a stop and after a few confused minutes, a rumour shuffled through the crowd that we had to move off the road because a fire engine needed to pass through. We waited with no sign of the fire engine until a slow distant drumming sound, reminiscent of a dirge, crept closer and closer. Then appeared the funeral marchers: activists dressed all in black, many of them carrying hand-made skeletons and extinct animals as well as coffins, a huge skull and black banners with various psychedelic paintings of the Earth. Beside them walked protesters holding monochrome depictions of a child screaming with the statement 'Our Legacy' written underneath, urging a sense of historical responsibility. Their

faces were sullen and determined as they looked at the ordinary activists standing at the side of the road. There was a hushed and solemn atmosphere which contrasted sharply with the earlier noise, excitement, and chanting.

How does a bystander react to this? The cultural reservoir of images viewers draw on in response to such a novel ritual is significant here. The funeral march is resolutely opposed to the rhythms and spatial ordering of everyday capitalist life, which finds its archetypal expression at Oxford Street. The march then could easily be imagined as the dystopic culmination of a potent, spontaneous *communitas*. Indeed, to stimulate this feeling of eeriness is of course central to the strategy of a protest performance which openly plays with decidedly cultish imagery. The function though of this macabre aesthetic is the same as presenting someone with an image of their own death as a way to stimulate a drive toward life affirming actions. The aim then is not simply to shock but to stir a sense of responsibility and engender an identification with a screaming child as 'Our Legacy'. This is the core logic of doomsaying realised in street theatre, since as Dupuy (2009: 212) notes, 'To make the prospect of a catastrophe credible, one must increase the ontological force of its inscription in the future'. Therefore, the funeral march 'ontologically inscribes' the catastrophe into one's future *personal* death through a ritualistic mourning of *collective* death.

Leading the funeral march were the 'red brigade' (see Fig. 6). These are special activists who, dressed in scarlet robes with vivid white makeup frequently appear at demonstrations, walking silently and slowly, often with palms lifted to the sky in a searching expression. The 'ordinary' activists I spoke to that day expressed excitement, awe and respect towards them and offered opinions on the symbolism of these eccentric and mysterious performers. One activist told me she thought their scarlet dresses were meant to symbolise the blood of all extinct species or more generally the shared blood of all beings. Along these lines I argue that the red brigade are a kind of grief personified, standing as a silently beseeching conscience, their eerie costumes self-consciously employing a quasi-monastic millenarian imagery to signify their New Age ideology. This is an apostolic aesthetics to match an apostolic politics, a self-conscious use of millenarian visual tropes of otherworldliness and strangeness, seriously reflecting the movement's grieving-doomsaying outlook. As we shall see, this aesthetic has led to XR being denounced by some in the right-wing press as a 'death cult' but alternatively it is theatrical style of protest that clearly catches public attention.

If the protest in London that day was a noisy carnivalesque interruption with its bright colours, chants, banners and music, then the funeral march was an interruption of the protest itself, aimed at shifting the focus from loud oppositional protest, to quiet conscientious contemplation, as if the workshop had suddenly been thrown into the demonstration. The workshop and the funeral march both employ the same technique of saving the present from being overwhelmed in the face of the future. Yet the latter aims to make a spectacle of that process, of the grieving subjectivity itself, demonstrating that the crux of XR's doomsaying protest is the *performance of grief-as-truth*.

Reiteration is critical to this process. Take for instance the figure of Greta Thunberg who has rapidly become an icon for the contemporary climate movement. Thunberg's repetitive simplicity, righteous honesty and emotional authority mark her as apostolic. Specifically, her effectiveness rests in her clear re-statement of the truth of the crisis *against* the

status quo. For example, in her famous speech to the UN Climate Action Summit on 23rd September 2019 she said:

> This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school, on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!
>
> You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying.
>
> Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money, and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you! (Thunberg 2019)

Here Thunberg combines a moral outrage and an attribution of generational culpability with a passionate expression of her own loss of a future. Themes of extinction, theft of dreams and childhood, and impotent empty words take on their political force because Thunberg so openly displays her own grief, anger, and distress. These emotions, displayed on the world stage, authenticate the 'true reality' of ecological catastrophe. If Thunberg's formula of protest is 'I am here, this is how I feel, take this seriously, this shows the catastrophe is real' then XR collectively and performatively reproduce this.

Politically this protest style is oppositional in orientation because it is focused on the enunciation of truth against power alone, rather than the articulation of an alternative future. For instance, Ed told me firmly that 'it would be a catastrophe if XR joined up with [the] Labour [Party]' and supported their plan for a 'Green New Deal'. Likewise, Emily said that XR 'should be critically supportive but not aligned' in relation to political parties offering environmental plans. This rejection of politics

as the making of a different future in favour of apostolic clarity is foundational to both XR's ideology and practice.

## CONCLUSION: THE ANTI-POLITICS OF EXTINCTION REBELLION

In this conclusion I seek to explore Extinction Rebellion's position of being 'Beyond Politics'. Through developing an analysis of this position as a form of anti-politics—a rejection and sought for transcendence of politics—I will attempt to show its functional and ideological importance to grief and doomsaying. By demonstrating that XR is both self-avowedly anti-political and depicted as anti-political by its detractors, I will make explicit the diverse and divergent conceptions of 'politics' implicit in discourse regarding the movement. I hope to show how the anti-politics of Extinction Rebellion is both vital to the movement's specific performance of grief-as-truth, whilst also generating attendant issues for activists.

As we have seen, XR's performance of grief-as-truth is the manifestation of a New Age outlook derived from Joanna Macy which is emotional, ethical, spiritualistic, and humanistic, rather than political. Therefore, I use anti-politics not in the sense employed by the anthropologist James Ferguson (1994) to refer to technocratic depoliticization, but rather to refer to a project inherited from this New Age thought, of a) translating political issues into emotive-ethical issues of subjectivity and b) situating 'politics' as an obstacle to transcend. Anti-politics is of course paradoxically still a form of politics, a collective struggle enacted through certain tactics and strategies that seeks to transform the pre-existing 'system'. The *anti*-prefix is thus used in this article to demonstrate the way in which XR activists articulate their

struggle through an emotive New Age outlook which rejects 'politics' as limited, restricting, divisive, ineffectual, or corrupted, as a form of action rendered inadequate and practically obsolescent in the face of climate catastrophe which demands a new and expanded form of activism which transcends the merely 'political'. In this meaning of the concept of anti-politics, whilst XR are *in their own terms* 'Beyond Politics', they cannot be considered as without it. It is not, *à la* Ferguson, the anti-politics of a bureaucratic depoliticising rationalisation imposed on political situations, but rather an anti-politics practiced *by activists themselves*. The purpose of this conclusion then is to elucidate the complex relationship XR has to 'politics' in its variously imagined forms and the bearing this has on the performance of grief-as-truth.

XR's anti-politics is most clearly recognisable in their use of nonviolent civil disobedience which combines Gandhian *satyagraha* and liberalism. This style of protest coalesces the movement's anti-political attitudes into a common expression which comes closest to a traditional political outlook. During fieldwork activists commonly invoked historical figures such as Martin Luther King and Gandhi. For example, the speaker in Russell Square not only referenced Joanna Macy but also declared proudly 'We have a dream do we not? We are MLK's dream and Gandhi's change… Here today are the sacred seeds for a world transformation.' Here the speaker positions XR as heirs to a highly moral, humanistic and spiritualist tradition of nonviolent civil disobedience, which rests on *satyagraha* ('holding firmly to the truth') and the politico-ethical decision of citizens to be disruptive and give themselves up for arrest. Roger Hallam (2019), a key figure in the movement, articulates this morally infused approach in a podcast interview:

The climate catastrophe is not primarily political, it is primarily moral or criminal… It is certainly the case that there are things in the social field which are primarily moral rather than political…If you look at the speeches of Martin Luther King or mid-twentieth century left labour leaders they are basically appealing to universal values…[Now] in so much as everyone is going to die there is certainly a role for a universalistic sort of messaging.

The imagined *political* subject who answers this moral and universal demand for action is that of the citizen rising up against an autocratic regime. For instance, at the end of *This Is Not a Drill*, the XR 'handbook', there is a faux social contract which encourages readers that 'if you feel that the state has breached the social contract, rip out this page and join Extinction Rebellion' (Extinction Rebellion 2019a: 197). This image of the conscientious citizen is supported by academic work popularly cited by activists. Erica Chenoweth's and Maria J. Stephan *Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011) is a significant influence in XR. In it they argue that nonviolent protest is more successful than using violence to achieve political aims, and that a movement is typically successful in achieving its aims if it can amass 3.5% of the population into the movement (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). Whilst Chenoweth and Stephan are by no means influential across the movement (see Harding 2020), they do legitimate a certain political imaginary, one that imagines fossil capitalism as akin to an autocracy (see Malm 2019), and activists as citizens rebelling against this criminal regime that has tarnished the social contract.

In isolation this is a highly ethical political imaginary that centres on the subject itself, on their performance of disruption, discipline of

pacifism and holding firm to the truth against autocratic power. Yet in its conjunction with the doomsaying practice of performing grief-as-truth, this 'political tactic' represented clearly by Hallam, *functions as a form of anti-politics*. This civil disobedience tradition, derived from the historical figures of King and Gandhi and legitimated by the 'fact' provided by Chenoweth and Stephan, is the public face of XR's protest, situating them in a recognisable imaginary of citizenship, pacifism, and direct action. In this sense it provides a historically and academically legitimated 'political' tactic for an anti-political subjectivity, enabling activists to participate in a common self-image and shared language. Yet as we shall see it can also generate attendant issues for the movement since as Malm (2021: 126) critically notes, the fossil economy here 'is understood as similar to an autocracy, a category mistake that licenses pretty much anything for disruption'.

Activists said consistently throughout fieldwork that the movement performed a purely conscientious role, leaving the actual process of dismantling the fossil economy to a Citizens' Assembly. This deferment of solutions and the praxis of social transformation, that is, 'politics' proper, to a future horizon of un-mediated direct democracy functionally clears the space for the performance of grief-as-truth in the present. Thus, the narrative of non-violent civil disobedience is *not anti-political in of itself* but through its emphasis on the ethical it accommodates and enables the anti-political outlook of the New Age. In this sense then the narrative and tactic of civil disobedience is functionally subordinated to the process of generating activist subjectivities and performing grief as the truth which authenticates catastrophe.

By analysing a controversial protest event—which for Malm is the outcome of theorising the fossil economy as an autocracy—we can see what XR's anti-politics practically entails. This protest incident took place at Canning Town Tube station, in East London on 17th October 2019 towards the end of the International Rebellion. During morning rush hour at the station, a group of protestors stood on top of a train causing considerable disruption. The activists were dragged off and physically assaulted by a small group of angry commuters. The incident caused a huge controversy with many activists questioning the decision and senior figures criticising the people who took part (Townsend 2019). It was perceived by activists as an action which alienated public support since it disrupted working-class commuters rather than the government or fossil fuel corporations. Moreover, the act was seen to be hypocritical as in a video of the protest itself commuters can be heard arguing with the activists saying, 'you're stopping an electric train…It's electric!' (ITV News 2019). An internal poll found 72% of activists 'opposed action on London's underground network under any circumstances' and whilst 'It is understood the results of the survey were shared with the groups planning the transport action before it took place' it nevertheless went ahead (Gayle and Quinn 2019).

Organisationally the incident demonstrates the flaws of a totally horizontal decision-making structure. The protest took place despite the fact 72% of activists were against it because there are no centralised structures at a national level in the movement for democratically making collective decisions. XR then diverges from traditional political organisations which have structures through which to make and mediate a united strategy. The affinity group protesting at Canning Town was in fact a group of Christian activists, seemingly outliers to mainstream XR views on who and what are legitimate protest

targets (Harding 2020). Here then XR is organisationally anti-political because whilst highly divergent political differences exist within the movement such as Deep Adaptation, social justice and the New Age, these differences find no formal structural avenue to be democratically recognised, expressed and mediated, existing instead as different worldviews rather than matters of negotiated political disagreement.

Reflecting this model of organisation is a form of protest which is more the manifestation of individual moral-emotive judgement sanctioned by the truth, than the outcome of collective strategy, orientated more towards affective stimulation of other citizen-subjects, than 'rational' persuasion. This bears an affinity with Michel Foucault's notion of *parrhesia* as the courageous and critical telling of truth against tyrannical sovereignty. It is the dutiful aspect of *parrhesia* which is most evident in activists' self-perceptions of their doomsaying. As Foucault (2001: 19) put it in a lecture as part of a series delivered at the University of California, Berkeley in 1983, 'The orator who speaks the truth to those who cannot accept his truth, for instance, and who may be exiled, or punished in some way, is *free* to keep silent. No one forces him to speak, but he feels that it is his duty to do so'. Doomsaying is thus a form of *parrhesia*. This comparison highlights XR's anti-politics as a kind of duty-driven conviction, a fidelity to certain symbolically important ideas. It is ideas like Truth, Mother Earth, Humanity or History which motivate activists more than political allegiance or definite material goals. This idealism exists both at the level of activists' subjectivities and objectively as constitutive of XR's ideological outlook. It is made possible only when activists are freed from the necessity to 'do politics'.

Importantly, it is a universalising human-ism that is positioned here as the force that can overcome politics. For instance, as one speaker at the Manchester Northern Rebellion put it, 'We are not a political movement, we are a movement of humanity!' Another activist at the 2019 Mill Road Winter Fair in Cambridge reassured me as he handed out a flyer: 'Don't worry we're not political!' This transcendent humanism and steadfast distancing from politics echoes the archetypal unifying calls of millenarianism, the 'calls to forget the narrow loyalties of the past, to abandon those things that divide…and to practice a new moral code of brotherly love' (Worsley 1957: 237). Implicit in XR's position of being 'Beyond Politics' is the notion of politics as divisive, fragmentary and polarising, as an obstacle to be overcome, to be rejected in favour of universal ideals shifting consciousness and mobilising action. As Bendell 2019: 79) puts it, 'we make universal love our compass as we enter an entirely new physical and psychological terrain'. Overall then XR's anti-politics of grief is idealistic, humanistic, universalistic, emotional and ethical.

However, XR is not simply 'Beyond Politics' on its own terms but also in its detractors' terms, who unfavourably compare the movement to millenarianism—or rather to a stereotyped millenarianism—portraying the movement as *transgressing* the boundaries of politics imagined as a realm of rational moderate debate. Thus 'politics' is a normative discursive device, used to both legitimise and discredit different beliefs and movements (see Toscano 2017). For instance in some opinion columns of the right-wing British press, XR has been variously condemned as an 'an upper-middle class death cult' (O'Neill 2019), a 'new millenarian cult' (Williams 2019), a 'hysterical doomsday cult' (McKinstry 2019) and a 'primeval, anti-capitalist cult' (Clark 2019), guilty of 'clueless doom-mongering' (Lesh 2019), 'sheer irrationalism' (O'Neill 2019), and 'apocalyptic moralism' (Young 2019). One

commentator describes activists as being 'in an emotional fugue state, their eyes burning brightly, like evangelicals possessed by the Holy Spirit.' (Young 2019). The influential right-wing thinktank Policy Exchange also published a 72-page review of XR, describing them as 'an extremist organisation' with 'an extremist ideology' (Walton and Wilson 2019). XR was even for a brief period placed on an official counter-terrorism list. As *The Guardian* reported: 'The guide placed Extinction Rebellion alongside neo-Nazi groups and jihadists and encouraged public sector workers to report any individuals with links to them to Prevent, the controversial anti-radicalisation programme' (Grierson and Dodd 2020).

The point of these comparisons is at worst to depict XR as fanatical, irrational and dangerous and at best, bizarre, obscure and worthy of ridicule. Indeed, as Luke put it regarding hostile attitudes to his activism, 'People regarded me as a wacko!'. Here then XR activists are depicted as being 'outside the frame of political rationality' and 'the domain of negotiation' as 'intransigent, incorrigible subject[s]' (Toscano 2017[2010]: xi), consumed by an excess of eco-mystic conviction and fixated on chaos. If the discursive separation between religion and politics is central to secular modernity, then millenarianism stands as an offensive contravention of this division as it is 'bent on collapsing the city of God into the city of man in an apocalyptic conflagration' (Toscano 2017 [2010]: 69). Hence why the m-word is used to denounce XR, standing as the imaginary extremist Other to the realm of ordinary, sensible and pragmatic politics, signifying an absurd pre-modern catastrophism. The space of politics invoked here is not simply the status quo of capitalist accumulation and its attendant developmental temporality, but rather the basic parameters of modern politics purged

of religion, irrationalism, apocalypticism and spiritualism. Therefore, XR are depicted as both anachronistic—outside politics as enlightened modernity—and fanatical—outside of politics as rational moderation.

Extinction Rebellion's anti-politics of grief is a project of framing the climate breakdown as a catastrophe requiring above all a subjective and emotional response which posits politics as an obstacle to transcend. If grief is the originating act of a model XR activist, then anti-politics is its ideological scaffolding beyond the workshop and on the streets, orientating activists as a feature of the doomsaying method not only towards climate catastrophe, but the realm of contemporary 'politics-as-usual', clearing the space for activists to perform their grief by evacuating the present of the necessity to 'do politics'. Politics is rejected as that which compromises the effective clarity of doomsaying, the apostolic reiteration of the truth against power. The anti-political project of XR, characterised by its relation to politics-as-ambiguous-other is functionally and ideologically vital to the movement's mode of operating, namely, their doomsaying performance of grief-as-truth which I have sought to explore in this article. The construction of subjectivity and its performance—the workshop and the streets—would not be possible without this anti-politics which positions activists in relation to a status quo they reject, forms of politics they seek to transcend, their own subjectivities, and the world in catastrophic breakdown that they are determined to change.

## CODA

The long-term outcome of Extinction Rebellion's project is yet to be fully materialised. In the meantime the movement continues to

generate successes, failures, and controversy. Yet what Extinction Rebellion should now provoke anthropologists to consider is not simply the fact of climate catastrophe and the transformations it is unevenly inflicting in world, but the specific *ways* in which groups, communities, and movements are mobilising against this unfolding disaster. Anti-politics is a response that demonstrates that climate catastrophe is a productive force: it is engendering new forms of political subjectivity, ideology, and organisation, new ways of protesting and apprehending the future, which are *opposed* to politics itself. This means anthropologists need to attend to the politics of climate catastrophe in its divergent forms, from XR's anti-politics, to the emergent 'fossil fascism' of an ascendant far-right (see Malm and The Zetkin Collective 2021) and the resistance of the oppressed throughout the world.

This last case should remind us, *as anthropologists*, of Walter Benjamin's insistence that 'The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that 'the state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule' (Benjamin 1970 [2015]: 248). Benjamin reminds us that 'We should attain to a conception of history in keeping with this insight' (Benjamin 1970 [2015]: 248). I argue similarly, that in apprehending climate catastrophe and considering the political responses to it, anthropologists need to keep this lesson in mind. Anthropology, more than other disciplines should be able to attend to this catastrophe without fascination, awe, or confusion, but with an urgency, participation, and direction that reflects the gravity of the contemporary juncture, precisely because those 'others' anthropologists have studied are those for whom catastrophe is nothing new, but rather the fact of history itself.

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## NOTES

1 I have replaced all of the names of activists with pseudonyms in order to protect their anonymity.
2 I have derived this idea of apostolic politics from an interview conducted by the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2019).
3 See Brown, Molly (ed.) 2021. *Deep Times: A Journal of The Work That Reconnects* 6 (2).
4 As Brabender, Smolar and Fallon put it in *Essentials of Group Therapy* (2004: 97): 'Whereas self-disclosure pertains to a *cognitive* sharing of information about the self, catharsis is an *affective* sharing.'
5 This model proposed by the psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross argues that there are five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance.

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*Lidia Gripenberg*

# LECTIO PRÆCURSORIA

## *They Look Me In The Eyes And I Smile And Then We Know: The Interaction of Finnish Roma and East European Roma in Finland*

28 September 2019, University of Helsinki

**ABSTRACT**

A lectio præcursoria is a short presentation read out loud by a doctoral candidate at the start of a public thesis examination in Finland. It introduces the key points or central argument of the thesis in a way that should make the ensuing discussion between the examinee and the examiner apprehensible to the audience, many of whom may be unfamiliar with the candidate's research or even anthropological research in general.

Dear Custos, my esteemed Opponent Professor Robbins, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On 20 September 2018, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland published an occupational barometer. This barometer indicated that the number of labour shortage professions in Finland has increased. Within two years, the number of professions suffering from labour shortages has increased from 15 to 48, out of 200 professions under investigation. The increase in the labour shortage in Finland has been associated with people from larger age groups, born during years with a high birth rate (over 100 000 / year) after the Second World War in the period 1945–11950 who have reached the retirement age, and the lower birth rate in subsequent decades. According the report of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment of Finland, from 2010 both long-term economic and labour

market forecasts suggest that problems with the availability of the work force will increase in future. With the aging of the population age structure, the availability of the work force is expected to rapidly decrease from the beginning of the 2010s. According to this estimation, in the area of social services and healthcare sector alone, there will be 180 000–1 220 000 positions open during the period 2005–2020, which amounts to approximately 20% of the entire labour market.

One way to solve this challenge has been sought in occupational migration. It has been estimated that in the future Finland will need long-term and short-term migrants. On 15 September 2018, the headlines of *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's and the Nordic countries' largest subscription newspaper, stated 'They come to Finland, get training for branches with labour deficiencies, get employed and stay – Is there a panacea in immigration and labour

shortages in South Ostrobothnia.' Migration into Finland, however, is not seen only as a positive phenomenon in the public debate in the country, but the dangers of unsuccessfully managing it have also been the focus of public attention.

On 29 January 2018, the newspaper *New Finland (Uusi Suomi)* featured a blog post from the former head police officer Mikko Paatero on Swedish gang violence titled, 'The internal security of Sweden is cracking' [translation by the author]:

> *Recently, many alarming news items have been heard from Sweden and its internal security situation. The grenade attacks, the intensified operation of organised crime, the existence of parallel societies' concerns. It is noted that there are a bit less than 1000 young men in Sweden who belong to criminal networks and are able to use a firearm. Although the figure is considered large, there is not much difference with the situation in Finland. In Sweden, the attacks and threats against the police have increased dramatically and being a police officer is no longer a popular job. In addition, trust in the police has deteriorated due to these issues, despite the fact that the number of police officers has been increased in recent years and is now undergoing a strong recruitment campaign with considerable additional funding from politicians. There are 15 such areas in Sweden where the police do not go for small issues at all and for bigger issues large numbers of police go in because there is open hostility towards the police. This development has not happened in Sweden suddenly, but over years. It started in the 1990s and as immigration has increased, it has been increasing all the time. In Sweden, there has clearly been no control over the huge immigration wave that has come.* (Paatero 2018)

In contemporary Europe in general, migration is a highly controversial topic, one that is continuously present in daily headlines and intensively employed in the election campaigns of politicians. As the above examples clarify, in the case of Finland, migration is appreciated as a potential for strengthening the manpower of an aging society and enriching the cultural diversity of a smaller scale Nordic country. At the same time, migration is seen and experienced as a threat. The news of outbreaks of vandalism in areas with predominantly migrant populations in the neighbouring country of Sweden and the terrorist attack in Turku on 18 August 2017, during which two innocent women lost their lives when attacked by an asylum-seeking migrant and several people were seriously injured, can hardly leave anyone indifferent. Nevertheless, migration is a fact with which Europeans need to come to terms.

The PhD dissertation examined today investigated the attitudes and interaction of an established minority group in Finland, the Finnish Kale, with a part of the newcomer immigrant population, Eastern European Roma. In addition, this dissertation examined efforts on the behalf of some Finnish Kale to facilitate the integration of the latter into a new country. This research is based on participant observation in connection with 14 months of intensive fieldwork during 2014–2015, supported by the tacit knowledge gained through long-term friendships with representatives of Bulgarian and Finnish Roma as well as social work amongst Finnish Roma. Often during my fieldwork, I acted as an interpreter, facilitating interactions between representatives of different groups or helping newly arriving immigrants to deal with the necessary paperwork and when communicating with authorities. I am aware that this role put me in a specific power position relative to the participants of my research.

I ensured that all of the people involved were informed of my task as a researcher. That said, I saw my task as a researcher as a possibility to devote time and effort to supporting people, whom I cared for and some of whom I had known for a long time.

Migration and the encounters of people representing different communities call for a process of identification. The questions 'who am I' and 'who is the other', along with 'what unites us and what separate us', 'can we cooperate and improve each other's wellbeing', or 'what kinds of sacrifices does our cohabitation call for' tacitly arise in people's minds when being introduced to an unknown person or group of people. What external factors influence the emerging relationship are equally important. Yet, migration amongst Roma has its particularities. The migration of people belonging to a minority group which has suffered marginalisation for centuries throughout Europe differs from the case of people migrating for economic reasons or those fleeing from danger who had not faced marginalisation prior to their migration.

An important issue associated with migration is the humanitarian aid extended to refugees as a means of protecting basic human rights. During 2015 in connection with the crisis in Syria, more than 32 000 people entered Finland and applied for refugee status. Those individuals were immediately granted shelter and food provisions for the period of investigating their refugee applications, some of which are still being processed almost four years later. At the same time, many Finnish Kale had a burning question in their mind: 'Why is the government of our country generously spending money on tens of thousands of people coming from outside Europe, but will not provide any support to the 300–400 poor, homeless Eastern European Roma who entered Finland in the previous few years after Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007?' Were Eastern European Roma in Finland less important as human beings as they fled hunger and marginalisation in their home countries, not receiving any humanitarian support in Finland either?

There were clear political reasons and international agreements behind the decision of the Finnish state and municipalities back in 2015. Finland was committed to encouraging work-related migration. Permanent residents of Finland were entitled to social security, while other EU citizens could benefit from it only if they were residing in Finland for work as employees or as self-employed individuals. Since Bulgarian and Romanian Roma were citizens of EU countries and not residents, instead only temporary visitors (at least on paper) to Finland, they were supposed to obtain social support from their country of origin. From that point of view, Finland had practically no official obligations to them at the time. Nevertheless, for ordinary citizens the question remained, 'Why are some people being taken care of and others left to potentially freeze to death in Nordic winter nights?'

The Finnish Kale not only asked questions, but some were ready for action providing the resources and possibilities they had to hand. Not many in terms of numbers, but strong in zeal and ready to sacrifice, the Finnish Kale had already been assisting their fellow Eastern European Roma for the last few years in their efforts to settle in Finland. Some provided accommodation to newcomers in their homes and helped them to learn Finnish, find employment, and subsequently a home of their own. 'The guests' in return tried to be helpful in handling household matters with small repairs, making food, taking care of children, and mending cars among other things. Some

Finnish Kale nongovernmental organisations also acted on behalf of Eastern European Roma on the societal, political, and religious levels. In short, it could be said that this desire amongst the Finnish Kale, to help and support essentially foreign people, individuals with whom they barely had any common language, but with whom through what appeared to me somewhat mysterious ways they felt connected, provided the inspiration for this research. Having said that, it is important to clarify that not all Finnish Kale were interested in establishing contact with Eastern European Roma in Finland. Many of the people with whom I met recognised Eastern European Roma as Roma, but felt that they were only very distantly related, and they thus had no intention of becoming acquainted with the newcomers.

My work focuses on the factors influencing the relationship between Finnish Roma and Eastern European Roma in Finland and the outcomes of those relationships. It aims at portraying and analysing the way Roma in Helsinki position themselves in the world in general and towards each other as representatives of different groups. In connection with that, the issue of 'how we people in general position ourselves in the world' also surfaced. As major factors shaping the prerequisites of the interaction between Finnish Roma and Eastern European Roma in Finland, I have identified a Roma identity, Pentecostalism, and Charismatic Christianity as well as nationality as most important.

Specifically, I investigated how ethnicity, religion, and nationality engage with each other in the interactions between different Roma groups in Helsinki. I described how people negotiate a balance between different identities in the continually ongoing process of identification that accompanies this balancing

act. In the case of most Finnish Kale and several Eastern European Roma, my understanding is that they saw their own Roma identity as an ethnic identity. This ethnic identity was defined by their shared origin in terms of the principle of descent from an assumed common ancestor as well as by the distinctive 'Kale culture' or Romani language and Roma traditions in the case of Eastern European Roma. However, the cultural commonality perceived by informants clearly relied more on the experience of a shared understanding than it did on any demonstrable similarity of the cultural traditions. I suggest that, in this case, 'the discourse on ethnicity has escaped from the academy and into the field', as argued by Banks (1996: 189). Given that ethnicity and ethnic identity are abstract concepts defined in academia, rather than ontological things existing in the world, it is possible to discuss how much social reality has influenced the creation of concepts and how much these concepts have in turn influenced social reality.

I am aware that in the social sciences the term identity has been utilised in ambiguous ways, carrying contradictory meanings or associated with reifying connotations. Identity has been specified as fluid, with multiple and constantly negotiated meanings, which may lead to an oxymoron with no real meaning. As stated by Brubaker and Cooper (2000: 3) in his essay 'Beyond "Identity"', the concept is troubled by the 'overproduction and consequentdevaluation of meaning'. Nevertheless, based on my own fieldwork experience, I argue that for most of the Roma with whom I worked, ethnic identity was a meaningful concept, and many Roma felt that it reflected their social reality and gave them the chance to define themselves as people or 'ascribe themselves a name', as argued by Foucault (2002 [1966]: 132). The use of the concept has

arguably also altered social reality at times, most obviously in terms of ethnic mobilisation.

In the process of identification, certain identities influence one another. For example, for some participants of this study, religious identity at times could completely override Roma identity. In these cases, people felt that they belonged first and foremost to the community of the 'children of God' or were 'Jesus's own', which most of the time was equated with being members of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. At the same time, the importance of a certain identity could vary situationally and require participants of the study to exercise their judgement and find suitable compromises. Such was the case when the Finnish Kale willingly interacted with Eastern European Roma during the evangelising meetings they organised for these Eastern Europeans, but would deliberately keep their distance during occasions intended mostly for Finnish Kale. In these cases, it appeared to me that their Kale identity, and the social obligations deriving from it, prevailed.

Often, the interplay between different social identities was crucial to the outcome of encounters between representatives of different Roma groups. Representatives of different Roma groups, who as part of their religious identity did not associate themselves with the Pentecostal or Charismatic movement, would recognise each other as Roma most of the time, but often avoid close contact. In contrast, most of the participants in my research who were members of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches would gladly interact with each other. Some of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Kale would even make substantial sacrifices in order to support a needy Eastern European Roma person or family.

Differences in nationality appeared to be strongly emphasised in cases where people did not subscribe to the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. The Finnish Kale often emphasised that they were exclusively Finnish Roma and many did not want to be associated in any way with these newcomer Eastern European Roma. Based on national belonging, Bulgarian and Romanian Roma divided resources and territory among themselves, both in terms of different areas of town, as well as inside the Day Centre they used most often.

Roma identity, Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity, and nationality can also be seen as three different albeit related social fields (or, perhaps better, subfields) as described by Bourdieu (1995: 66–68), in the sense that each of them has its own rules and demands. Regarding nationality, ethnicity, and religion as three different social subfields makes it possible to discuss how people live within these fields and how they sometimes follow the rules of one and at other times follow the rules of another. For example, the same Bulgarian and Romanian Roma might behave differently if they met in the setting of the Day Centre or at a Pentecostal gathering. People's identities are not necessarily affected by these social and strategic choices of how to live in different fields; yet, this approach allows us to focus on how people live and experience their lives without having to establish what this says about their identities. That could possibly be the subject of future research.

One of the main topics of this work is spirituality. Spirituality has been discussed in anthropology for the most part in connection with research on non-European communities and non-Christian religious groups. When doing research on Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christian communities, researchers have approached the subject primarily as a social and cultural issue. In contrast, this research

addresses the spiritual dimension of it as seen and experienced by participants of this research.

I now call upon you, Professor Robbins, as the opponent appointed, to present your critical comments on my dissertation.

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*Victoria Peemot*

# LECTIO PRAECURSORIA

## *The Horse in My Blood: Land-Based Kinship in the Sayan and Altay Mountains, Inner Asia*

4 December 2021, University of Helsinki

**ABSTRACT**

A lectio præcursoria is a short presentation read out loud by a doctoral candidate at the start of a public thesis examination in Finland. It introduces the key points or central argument of the thesis in a way that should make the ensuing discussion between the examinee and the examiner apprehensible to the audience, many of whom may be unfamiliar with the candidate's research or even anthropological research in general.

Honoured Custos, honoured Opponent, members of the audience!

In March 2012, I attended the annual Helsinki Horse Fair for the first time. At that time, I was a recent divorcee, overwhelmed by the enormous responsibility of raising children in Finland. I remember walking with my daughters through the exhibition centre that accommodated a show arena and stalls for the horses. My older daughter, Ottugmaa Aino, stopped by a stall with a playful Scottish Clydesdale which actively interacted with visitors. The five-year-old blazed bay Clydesdale stood at 180 centimetres at its withers and weighed almost one tonne. That Clydesdale was quite different from a horse breed I grew up riding in my homeland, the Tyva Republic in Inner Asia.[1] Tyvan horses are smaller: up to 140 cm at the withers and with an average weight of 350 to 450 kg. Still, when I inhaled the Clydesdale's smell—a rich mixture of horse sweat and hay—I broke into tears. I felt

as if I had found a lost part of myself amidst horses, their familiar smells, and voices. I poured my longing for horses and home into an article, 'The Land of Horses' (2012), which was published in the Finnish magazine *Tunne Hevonen* (*Know the Horse*). In May of that same year, my two daughters and I visited the horse centre named 'The Happy Horse' in Spain, located about an hour's drive from Barcelona. The centre's founder, Una McLister, practices natural horsemanship. She also takes in rescue horses. While Una's students were helping my daughters, four and two years old at the time, to ride Shetland ponies, Una told me that it is good to educate children about horses because they will shape our shared future with horses. A few years later at the same Helsinki Horse Fair, my younger daughter Paju Ayalga, eight years old then, stopped at the entrance to the arena hall and held her breath. I was sure that, as tidy and picky as she is, Paju would complain about 'the rich mixture of horse sweat and hay.' I was wrong. Paju Ayalga told me in Finnish,

'*Me, Tuvalaisia, kaikki olemme maalaisia. Emme pelkää hevosten hajusta!*', which means, 'We are the Tyva people, and we all come from the countryside. We are not afraid of the horses' smell.' Paju Ayalga was born in Helsinki. What Tyvan she has in her comes from the Tyvan language that we speak at home, and from brief visits to Tyva in summers. During one of those visits a couple of years ago, my cousin Aisula presented Paju with a buckskin filly. Paju loves to talk about her own equine and waits for the birth of foals. I explained to Paju that now we have an obligation to bring gifts to my cousin for looking after the mare. To Paju Ayalga, the buckskin mare is an entry point to my kinship networks in Tyva, serving as a way to learn about obligations which come with relationships. On the other hand, Paju Ayalga connects with her mare's homeland in Tyva, between the Sayan and Altay Mountains of Inner Asia. I hope this makes Tyva a special place to Paju, who believes that travelling and exploring new countries and cultures are the best things in life.

When I started my studies at the University of Helsinki in 2015, I planned to write about all of the knowledge of horses accumulated by countless generations of Tyva horsemen. Through years of field research in Tyva and Mongolia, I came to understand that horses help us tell our human stories; and these human–horse stories are undetachable from our homelands where they live together. The focus of my study, I realised, is the mutual coming together of horsemen with their horses and the sentiment towards their homelands. Thus, my dissertation, entitled 'The Horse in My Blood: Land-Based Kinship in the Sayan and Altay Mountains, Inner Asia', is a study of relationships between the horsemen from my clan—the Soyan people—their horses, and our homelands in southern Tyva.

What is land-based kinship? It is a translation of the Tyvan concept *čer törel*. I will briefly explain the meanings encompassed by the expression *čer törel* in the Tyvan language. The word *čer* conveys a multiplicity of meanings, and can be translated into English as 'the Earth', 'the land', 'landscape', 'the ground', and 'wilderness'. *Törel* means 'a relative' or 'kin'. It comes from the stem *tör-*, meaning 'to give birth' or 'to be born'. It is part of the expression *töreen čer*, which is 'the birthplace'. Thus, the concept *čer törel* encompasses the meanings 'those who are born in the same land' and 'those who are related through shared belonging to a homeland'. In my dissertation, I expand on its meaning by including nonhuman animals and horses. I apply land-based kinship as a theoretical framework to understand the complexity of relationships between horsemen, their horses, and interspecies' shared homelands. Herding communities in the Sayan and Altay Mountains have a deep sense of belonging to their homelands because their clans have inhabited the same land for multiple generations. This reinforces a relational perception of landscapes as one's birthplace, active or abandoned campsites, places where one's kin lived, seasonal pasturelands, hay-cutting places, watering holes, nearby and far afield pastures for various livestock animals, and paths that connect seasonal grounds. All of these understandings reveal the inherent sociality of landscapes for pastoralists—homelands keep and share knowledge about the people who live there. The anthropologist Caroline Humphrey (1989), who conducted field research in Tyva at the end of the Soviet period, observed the resilient sense of belonging of the Tyva people to their clan grounds. At the time, she defined rural communities in Tyva as 'patrilineal localised clans'. This means that geographical belonging often reveals one's clan kinship. For

instance, when I say the name of the village where I was born—Ak-Erik by the River Tes—my interlocutors in Tyva know that I belong to the Soyans, my father's clan. Until the border demarcation in 1932, my clan lived in the Xaan Kögey Mountains and was known as the Soyans of Kögey. This new borderline was the first in history to demarcate the border separation between Mongolia and Tyva. The Soyans' clan territories became part of Mongolia. The government of Tyva officially displaced the clan, renamed the administrative unit after a new location, and prohibited herders from crossing the border. However, the Soyans continued to move to the former clan grounds in summers. Because of their resistance to the government's orders and their reluctance to abandon the clan's homeland in the Kögey Mountains, the Soyans were harshly persecuted during the political repressions of the 1930s, then imprisoned, exiled, and executed. I will return to this later.

I grew up seeing Xaan Kögey as a blue line on the southern horizon when viewed from our seasonal spring-to-autumn pastures around Lake Shara-Nuur. Whilst unreachable at the time, Xaan Kögey was always visually present and featured in stories I heard from my grandparents. I visited the Xaan Kögey Mountains for the first time in summer 2016 and made offerings to the great mountain. Later, I felt an even stronger sense of belonging with Xaan Kögey, when I was a guest with a family of local herders Dorlig Namsüren and Gambodrax Namsïlmaa who are from the Bayad group. We visited them at their summer place, named Xar Xučir by the River Turuun in the northern valleys of Xaan Kögey. After listening to a story about my clan's previous habitat in the Xaan Kögey Mountains, our host, Namsïlmaa, responded with the welcoming words, 'So, we are kin because we share a homeland. We are happy to meet our kin.' I conducted fieldwork

in the vast transboundary region of Tyva and Mongolia for several years—from 2015 to 2019. I was welcomed and often addressed as kin by herders who belong to different ethnic groups and speak different languages. '*Tyva gadaat emes*' ('A Tyva is not a foreigner'), I was told by an old Kazakh man from the village of Saksay in Bayan-Ölgii aymag, Mongolia. The Tyva people who live in the Altay Mountains of Mongolia addressed me as 'our kin from Taŋdï-Tyva', referring to the mountain range Taŋdï-Uula in Tyva. These encounters taught me a lesson—our homelands unite us despite differences in nationalities, ethnicities, and languages. Kinship by land is a way to overcome and heal past traumas, such as displacement from clan grounds or problems in cross-border relationships.

In all of these encounters with herders in Inner Asia, we shared stories about horsemen and horses. There, I was never asked, 'Why horses? Why do you study relationships with horses?' Here, in the West, I am regularly asked that question, 'Why horses?' The question puzzles me every time, because it is difficult to give a brief answer about something as important as a horse. So, let me answer using the words of my horseman-uncle Roman Aldïn-Xerel. He once told me, 'A horse is everything in life. Without horses, our people would not exist in history.' This echoes the words of the anthropologist and equestrian Niobe Thompson (2018), who said, 'The human story is the horse story.' I want to draw your attention to the fact that the horse has always been political—across all 6000 years of our existing together and it continues to be political today. Perhaps, this statement is best illustrated by the story of the racehorse Ezir Kara. His name means the Black Eagle, and he lived in Tyva. Ezir Kara was born in 1930 in the herd of a man named Soyan Sandaŋmaa. He was an educated man,

a politician, and the head of the Soyan clan's administrative unit. His seasonal pastures were between Mount Agar, which is the heart of our clan territories today, and the Xaan Kögey Mountains, which I mentioned earlier. My uncle Roman Aldïn-Xerel heard from his father, Aldïn-Xerel Soyan, who knew Ezir Kara, who was black-coated—like his mother—had a gentle character and was a purebred Tyvan horse with a small stature. Ezir Kara won the all-Tyvan races for five consecutive years—from 1934 to 1938. The races took place in central Tyva. Simply arriving at the location, Ezir Kara travelled hundreds of kilometres from his summer pastures in the Xaan Kögey Mountains.

In Tyva, horses are believed to embody the life energy, or spirit, of their owners. Ezir Kara's exceptionally successful racing career expanded his representative power to the Soyan clan and all of southern Tyva. Later, as the winner of the all-Tyvan championships for multiple years, Ezir Kara was understood as embodying the Tyva people's collective life energy. In part four of my dissertation, I discuss regulations affecting the relationship between a horseman and a racehorse, which belongs to the category of special, beloved equines. I emphasised how these regulations inform the proper treatment of a racehorse during his lifetime, define the circumstances of his death as part of a special ritual, and determine the treatment of his flesh, especially the skull, after death. The skull is placed at the highest spot in the horse's homeland, usually a mountain peak. Horsemen regularly visit these spots; they make offerings to the mountain and their horses which are gone, asking them to look after people and livestock. Ezir Kara's status as the embodiment of all Tyva's life energy required a strictly regulated engagement with him: respect and care for Ezir Kara and his tack, and a long life. Within the cultural norms of Tyvan

horsemanship, it is expected that a champion racehorse lives until he cannot graze anymore, approximately up to the age of 25 to 30 years. His death had to strictly follow customs, and his skull had to be placed on his birthplace—the Agar Mountain—with regular offerings provided afterwards. All of these normative regulations were violated. In March 1939, Ezir Kara's owner Soyan Sandaŋmaa was imprisoned. He was falsely accused of antirevolutionary activities and executed in June 1939. Two weeks later, on 7 July, the all-Tyvan races took place. On the last day, people saw Ezir Kara alive. He was brought with other army horses to participate in the races. Witnesses later shared memories of how Ezir Kara was agitated, and how the army official declared that the horse belonging to an executed 'enemy of the people' cannot participate in the races. The Tyvan writer and journalist Kara-Küske Čoodu, the nephew of Ezir Kara's female owner Öškü-Saar Čoodu, studied the archival sources and met with people who knew the famous horse. Kara-Küske Čoodu collected rumours regarding how Ezir Kara met his end: he was sold to the Xakas people and taken 'beyond the Sayan Mountains'. He was gifted to the Soviet Army, and someone saw Ezir Kara abused, starved, and unable to stand on his own after dragging logs in the taiga by the Yenisey River.

In summer 2018, I asked my uncle, Kara-Küske Čoodu, for his opinion on what had happened to Ezir Kara. He answered, 'When Ezir Kara was released [from the tethering post before the races on 7 July 1939], people saw him running up to other racehorses on the steppe. Nobody saw him after that. Artem Borbak-ool, who was in the army and later worked for the KGB, told me that Ezir Kara was banned from racing, and the following night people came and took him, they conspired without telling Borbak-ool, and they killed

the horse. That must be true.' Killing Ezir Kara was an inconceivable violation of cultural norms and pastoralist lifeways. I asked myself, 'How could we, the Tyva people, whose life story is impossible without a horse, kill Ezir Kara, a horse that embodied the life energy of our people and homeland?' I still cannot fully comprehend it. In my dissertation, I show how the answer lies in the geopolitics of Tyva at the time, which was then controlled by the Soviet Union. The government of Tyva perceived Ezir Kara as undermining its politics, the objective of depopulating the border region, the socialist modernisation of pastoralist communities—a system that denied any ties between humans, nonhuman animals, and homelands. Through his research and numerous publications, Kara-Küske Čoodu contributed to the postsocialist revival of Ezir Kara's story, and to Ezir Kara becoming a symbol of political repression in the 1930s. The first monument dedicated to the famous racehorse was built in 1993. It is the memorial to victims of the repression, where Ezir Kara's name is written next to the names of repressed people. Since then, several more monuments to Ezir Kara have appeared in Tyva.

During my field research, I noticed that my Soyan informants emphasised their affinity with Ezir Kara's story. Descendants of Ezir Kara's owners boast a direct connection to the famed horse. Others trace their lineages to Ezir Kara through kinship ties to either Sandaŋmaa Soyan or his wife Öškü-Saar Čoodu. Ezir Kara's owner Soyan Sandaŋmaa's great grandson Soyan Sayan is the well-known horseman who breeds champion racehorses. Sayan told me about the new tradition in their family. Every year before the main races, the family invites a Buddhist lama and performs a special ritual at the last camping site at which Sandaŋmaa and Ezir Kara lived and from whence they were taken, a place named Kara-Xaya, The

Black Rock, in the Agar Mountains. There are many meanings to this ritual. First, it allows descendants of Ezir Kara's owners to reconnect with a landscape that has not been inhabited by their family for several decades. Second, the annual ritual at this place acknowledges and reinforces belonging between the descendants of Sandaŋmaa Soyan and the Kara-Xaya site and, through the shared Kara-Xaya homeland, with its famed inhabitant—the racehorse Ezir Kara. As a result, this ritual reinstates the racehorse in the human–nonhuman kinship network. Furthermore, it allows south Tyvan horsemen, especially descendants of the horse's owners, to approach Ezir Kara as a mediator between interspecies communities and sentient landscapes, and to rely on his ability to increase their life energy and to lift their spirits.

The ability of horse and landscape stories to restore human–nonhuman relationships in my homeland of Tyva reminds me of Julie Cruikshank's (1998: 3–4) observations related to Indigenous storytelling, which 'can construct meaningful bridges in disruptive situations'. Sweeney Windchief and Timothy San Pedro, the editors of *Applying Indigenous Research Methodologies: Storying with Peoples and Communities*, suggest '[t]hat's the beauty of stories … they can be what we need at the time of the telling' (2019: xxii). They further observe that, over an extended period of interacting with a story, we change in relation to the story, and each time the story can teach us different lessons. These observations on the power of Indigenous storytelling have inspired me to acknowledge the potential of storying with my kin, our horses, and our homelands in Tyva. The Soyans' storying with the racehorse Ezir Kara is a way to heal, revive, and celebrate intraclan kinship and the clan's belonging with its homelands. The complexity of interwoven stories reminds me of my grandfather's explicit leatherwork. He used

different braiding techniques when crafting horse tack. My grandfather made saddle belts by braiding several leather strands in a complicated pattern. I helped him by holding one end of the leather piece, whilst my grandfather first cut it into strands, and then braided those strands together to create a beautiful and secure piece of tack. My grandfather was generous in sharing his craftsmanship with others. Similarly, I share stories that I have braided—listened to, connected, and written down—with communities in the Sayan and Altay Mountains and beyond.

Storying with my kin, homelands, and horses in the Sayan and Altay Mountains as a part of this research project has also been a personal healing journey for me. I have reinvigorated my kinship ties, renewed obligations, and engaged in empowering and inspiring storying with my human–nonhuman kin.

Honoured Opponent, Professor K. David Harrison, I now call upon you to present your critical comments on my dissertation.

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## NOTES

1  Specific letters of the Tyvan Cyrillic alphabet are transliterated as follows: ө – ö, ү – ü, ң – ŋ, ы – ï, й – y, ч – č, ш – š, ж – ž, and х – x. However, the vowel ы is transcribed as y in words derived from the ethnonym Tyva [Тыва], following the established transcription system. I write the ethnonym as Tyva: for example, the Tyva, the Tyva people, or the Tyva Republic. The form Tyvan is used as an adjective: for instance, Tyvan clothing or Tyvan food. When writing about equines in English, I use the gendered pronouns he/him and she/her. In the Tyvan language, the same pronoun *ol* (plural—*olar*) is used for he, she, or it. However, when talking about their equines, the Tyva horsemen employ an elaborate vocabulary that distinguishes animals by their age and gender.

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*Pilvi Posio*

# LECTIO PRAECURSORIA

## *Aspired Communities: The Communities of Long–term Recovery After the 3.11 Disaster in the Town of Yamamoto*

19 August 2022, University of Turku

**ABSTRACT**

A lectio præcursoria is a short presentation read out loud by a doctoral candidate at the start of a public thesis examination in Finland. It introduces the key points or central argument of the thesis in a way that should make the ensuing discussion between the examinee and the examiner apprehensible to the audience, many of whom may be unfamiliar with the candidate's research or even anthropological research in general.

Learned Custos, my esteemed opponent, honourable members of the audience:

My dissertation that I defend today explores the concept of community and long-term disaster recovery in the context of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami. My research is based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in the small, disaster-stricken town of Yamamoto in the Tohoku region in the Miyagi prefecture.

I left for Japan on a sunny autumn afternoon at the end of September in 2014. Everything was ready and my already-packed bags waited by the door to be transferred to the car. However, just before leaving for the airport, I rushed to plant some tulips in our garden. It was comforting to know that something beautiful would be waiting for me upon my return and exciting to learn later how the blooms would turn out.

Tulips became a promise of a return home for me. However, unlike me, not everybody in Yamamoto was able or even willing to return to their pre-disaster homes. Others, then again, opted to return to their pre-disaster homes in totally altered neighbourhoods. This does not mean that the wish, hope, and longing for home, a secure future, or community disappeared. The situation was actually quite the contrary. The need for a shared future extended from the material reconstruction to redefining community. This manifested as incredibly versatile and partly conflicting references to community and as various kinds of community activities.

The locals in the Tohoku region, however, faced a difficult task: they needed to re-envision their personal and collective future in relation to the disaster experience, the reinterpretation of pre-disaster life, and the continuous social and material changes brought about by the reconstruction. In the magnitude 9.0 earthquake and the following tsunami, the waves of which reached as high as 39 metres, over 20 000 people lost their lives, 6 200 were injured,

and 2 500 remained missing. Approximately 1 150 000 buildings were destroyed or damaged. The earthquake, tsunami, and the following Fukushima nuclear accident caused the temporary or permanent evacuation and relocation of over 470 000 residents.

In Yamamoto, 635 people lost their lives and nearly 5 000 buildings were destroyed or damaged. The tsunami inundated approximately 37 per cent of the town and destroyed the coastal neighborhoods, shrines and temples, fields and greenhouses, the coastal forest zone, the railway, and the known living environment altogether. During reconstruction, the disaster hazard zone policy prohibited building along the coast and the large-scale building projects continue to change the town's landscape. In addition, population decline and aging in the politically and economically peripheralised Japanese countryside shaped the future prospects of the town even before the 2011 disaster.

The future is also a central theme in my thesis, in which I explore community as a future-oriented process. Planning, dreaming, and striving for the future can be easily considered a highly self-evident part of the human experience. This, however, is what makes the future and particularly its role in the construction of social reality interesting to explore. Regardless of this, the future has often remained in the shadow of the past, shared memories, and collective memorialisation in the analysis of both community and disaster recovery. Recent studies have started to emphasise a future-focused dimension, but that focus has remained on anticipation and avoidance of risks and threats. In addition, community, social structures, and shared identities are argued as formed through this kind of risk construction or the avoidance of threats forming strong juxtapositions or clear boundaries.

In my research, however, I emphasise that risks, threats, uncertainties, avoidance, and anticipation alone are not sufficient in capturing the significance of the future in the formation of the experience of community. I invite the reader to explore with me instead what collective aspiring of the desired future can tell us about community in its varying forms. Of course, nothing certain can be said about the future, but the experience and the meaning of it can be studied in the present. Thus, with a future orientation I refer to temporal dimensions of present activities, or, in other words, to the ways we continuously orient towards the future and interpret the past based on future orientations.

This makes *community* an analytical framework of the process of meaning-making about the social reality instead of a definition or a categorical identity of a particular group. In my research I suggest that a future orientation of *collective aspiring* can serve as an analytical, conceptual tool that helps to understand how various forms of socialisation are interpreted and experienced as a community in diverse social practices attached to their material environments. That is, a community, which is dynamic, versatile, and even conflicting, but also very real, unified, stable, and even compelling as an experienced social reality.

The critical examination of community and the understanding of its temporal and spatial multifaceted nature are particularly important in the context of disaster recovery. The dynamic, processual nature of community is often neglected and, in some cases, politically motivated since reconstruction policies are based on rigid, place-bound pre-disaster community conceptualisations that may hinder recovery. Communities are experiencing disasters, yet they are valorised as the fountain of recovery resources and resilience. This kind of overemphasis on community capacity and spirit may delegate the responsibility of recovery

to the affected localities and divert attention away from the need for support and social and political problems.

After the disaster, many actors seek to define what kind of future the social, material, and political development should be directed towards. This can easily lead to conflicts. In Yamamoto, the reconstruction plan based on national guidelines aimed to respond to the challenges posed by disaster and decline, and to create a safe, viable, and attractive town by prioritising three new compact urban-styled reconstruction areas and relocating the railway away from the coast. These developmental visions based on tsunami risk estimations did not, however, resonate with the experiences and future wishes and aspirations of many of the residents. These residents felt that it was not their future for which the new town was built. Many coastal residents criticised the reconstruction plan and considered the massive, prolonged construction projects risking rather than securing the town's future.

One critical resident who had returned to the coast was Kaneko-san, a retired, yet active man in his neighbourhood. When I met Kaneko-san for the first time, he proudly introduced the communal field, library, and meeting place he established. However, according to his wife, he had not been such an active community organiser before the disaster. When asking Kaneko-san why he did all of this, this always cheery man suddenly became silent. With tears in his eyes even four years after the disaster, he said that he never again wanted to witness the sorrow that he saw on the faces of the residents returning from the coast the day after the disaster. He thinks that the togetherness that was felt in the disaster aftermath could serve as a basis for a secure future, not only in disasters, but also in the everyday life of aging residents.

Kaneko-san's case illustrates how community as intertwined social connections can form through what is collectively wanted and how: that is, past experiences and the interpretation of reconstruction laid a foundation for Kaneko-san's activities, but only the futural aspiring animates the community. By organising events, establishing meeting places, and participating in critical resident groups, Kaneko-san not only seeks to realise the future goal of a safe coastal community, but this constantly redefined action oriented pursuing towards and yearning for a sense of togetherness actualise this community.

For instance, working together in the field that Kaneko-san established, greeting neighbours passing by, choosing and planning which vegetables to plant, and waiting for the harvest connected people to perform an activity and shaped their experience of a shared future: The activity of farming in itself offered something to do, wait on, accomplish, and communicate together. This is not, however, a guarantee of an idealised sense of community, but collective aspiring may lead to contradictions, conflicts, and indifference. Some may want to plant carrots instead of potatoes and some consider sweating in the field entirely pointless.

Gardening and farming were regarded as important for social connections, but were impossible in the new urban residential areas depicted as safe, as Murata-san, a new resident remarked. She felt that her new home was nevertheless an important start for recovery, which granted many a temporal and spatial reference point after the prolonged liminal state in the barracks-like temporary housing. However, the change created anxieties and insecurities. The mixing of residents from different coastal districts and their divergent community rules and practices complicated

community building in the new areas. In addition, unknown neighbours and the threat to privacy caused by the dense building caused concerns. In particular, this emphasises the social dimensions of security.

Murata-san and the other new active residents sought to navigate together these social and material changes and to form new practices to create the community for which everybody yearned. According to Murata-san, meetings at trash collection points and when walking dogs became new opportunities to create social connections that would also serve as a safety net for the lone elderly at risk of marginalisation. However, while seeking to secure their community and its future, these residents also formed normative expectations of the proper enactment of community, such as by expecting everybody to introduce themselves to their neighbours regardless of their individual interests in socializing.

These are just snapshots of the diversity of futures and communities in post-disaster Yamamoto. This illustrates, however, how disaster recovery is not simply reconstructing social and material reality as it was. Instead, it can be seen as a process in which the capability of envisioning and enacting a future in and of place is recovered both individually and collectively. Furthermore, agency and power both between the residents and officials and within a community are accentuated in the exploration of the future and community in the post-disaster setting.

Honourable audience, I return for a moment to discuss tulips, even if they are not really such social entities. Indeed, a beautifully blooming flowerbed awaited me when I returned home in May 2015. This was not, however, a permanent accomplishment; a garden requires constant work and care for the new spring. In the end, a week before this defence, I completely remoulded that flowerbed and planted some peonies, which I hope will flourish. In addition to the expectation of future blooms, the activity of gardening in itself was meaningful for me during this process.

Likewise, the community is moulded in the continuous future-oriented dynamics of envisioning and enactment. Hence, I suggest in my thesis that community can be analysed in its various forms through and as a process of collective aspiring in itself. Sometimes, a community needs only a little maintenance; but, sometimes the world turns upside down, and sometimes it is necessary to plant roots in a new place. The great East Japan disaster was a massive and dramatic experience for everybody involved. It suddenly moulded locals' lives and their understanding of community, yet it alone did not fully define them. Disaster continues its existence as an experience that is a part of the life histories and the future trajectories of locals. It is important to pay closer attention to the processual nature and the role of aspiring in it, during the course of reconstruction and beyond.

Different crises, such as disasters, wars, and pandemics, may accentuate the uncertainty of the future. However, particularly in the midst of these kinds of disruptions, the significance of a shared future becomes highlighted both in individual and social lives. Thus, I hope that my research directs attention to this and provides tools to further examine how important shared futures are indeed to social life in both disaster recovery and everyday life.

This Lectio Praecursoria was originally delivered in Finnish and subsequently translated for this publication.

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# TYPECAST! SOME LESSONS FROM NORWEGIAN PUBLIC ANTHROPOLOGY

**ABSTRACT**

After many years of slumber, a string of disturbing political developments and setbacks in many parts of the world have convinced the anthropological community to recommit to its public role. As one of a mere handful of nations where anthropology has had a longstanding presence in public debates, Norway serves as an example for others to follow. In this essay, I use my experiences from years of varied media engagements to make the case for a public anthropology that is not merely a one-way enlightenment project but a tool for reflexivity and disciplinary critique. The didactic reformulation required when reaching out to new audiences can defamiliarise the things we know well and help us see things anew. In addition, the feedback, and occasionally outright resistance, often harvested by such outreach can provide a fresh take on established patterns of thinking and identify thematic and analytic blind spots. In Norway, anthropologists have gradually become collectively branded as belonging to the political left, which has blunted the potential impact of an anthropological critique. Showing that this branding is not entirely without substance, I argue that, by using media engagements as a two-way source of reflexivity, public anthropology can be a vital part of the discipline's epistemological agility.

KEYWORDS: public anthropology, media engagements, reflexivity, theoretical imperialism, the anthropology of good

## RETURN TO THE PUBLIC?

In this essay, I use my experiences from 15 years of anthropology-informed media engagements to address some challenges for public anthropology that, I argue, are shared across national boundaries.[1] I am fully aware of the audacity of this claim. In fact, there is a whole catalogue of reasons why this might be the easiest dismissible essay of all time. It can be read as a case of urgent ethnography, describing the remnants of a rare and fading academic culture that once encouraged public engagement in a rather broad sense, directed at a national audience that until quite recently was highly receptive (although not unconditionally) to such exposure. To some, it will also serve as a token of the death throes of a certain form of privilege associated with the white male European academic, who has failed to realise that anthropology has moved away from him and who has had his licence to walk barefoot

through the whole of culture permanently revoked. The argument could be further compartmentalised by being linked to what Peder Anker (2020) has called 'the power of the periphery', which refers to perspectives from academic fringe zones welcomed by those to whom they are useful while being easily shelved as quaint and thus posing no true challenge to those who disagree. After all, Norway's entire population is half that of New York, as some American colleagues keep reminding me. Still, I hold that there are lessons to be learned from Norwegian public anthropology, both in its heyday some 25 years ago (Eriksen 2003, 2005) and during its current slump. I also write this with a sense of urgency, because I have recently witnessed up close how anthropology can make people's lives better: not only by contributing to 'making the world safe for human difference', the apocryphal quote attributed to Ruth Benedict, or by reminding us that humans in general are kind, caring, and cooperative, as historian Rutger Bregman (2020) successfully has done by drawing extensively from anthropological studies, but also by bringing a sense of consolation in troubling times. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it has been my unmitigated privilege to present the pan-human panoramic perspective of anthropological theory to Norwegian broadcasting audiences on a more or less weekly basis. According to feedback from both media staff and listeners/viewers, these contributions took the edge off some of the uniqueness and existential loneliness that characterised life under pandemic restrictions. From the anthropological tool kit, Victor Turner's (1974) concept of *communitas* and the model of the various stages of social dramas provided interpretive frames for our collective responses to existential uncertainty during the initial phase of the pandemic; while a combination of Erving Goffman's (1959)

situational analysis and Mary Douglas' (1966) description of anomalies provided some clues to understanding why the home school-and-office existence felt so stressful and physically and mentally taxing. More recent works, such as Alan Fiske's (2019) comparative project on the multisensory modes that usually exist in physical communion and, consequently, are not easily reproduced digitally, granted solace to many who suffered from Zoom fatigue or experienced inexplicable social communication failures; while Michael Herzfeld's (2020) application of his term 'cultural intimacy' on the Covid lockdown phase not only made a number of pieces fall into place, but also reminded us that there are larger issues at stake beyond the pandemic navel that also need to be addressed. Witnessing the effect when people realise that their reactions are normal because they are precedented and shared by fellow humans across space and time has been remarkably rewarding. Anthropology has quite simply shown its power to bring people comfort. That is no minor feat.

Moreover, the timing for a recommitment to wider public engagements seems right. The insights anthropologists can bring to the table have always been unique. Now, they are also essential. Because even to dark times there is a silver lining. The past few years have brought us Brexit, Trumpism, an expansion of the European identitarian movement from a fringe phenomenon to the centre of politics, militarisation, and a marked autocratic turn to a number of regional and global powers, all of which seem to have jolted the long-slumbering vocation of engaged public anthropology. Where previously such involvements were made with reference to a vague sense of duty, 'because we should'—for the purpose of enlightenment, to give something back to the public that finances much of our research, or because it supports the profile or 'branding' of a university or a

discipline—these days there is a much stronger sense of existential necessity: 'because we must!' 'Truth and responsibility' was chosen as the theme for the 2021 American Anthropological Association (AAA) meeting, immediately followed by a refreshingly unconditional reminder of the 'imperative to bear witness, take action, and be held accountable to the truths we write and circulate' (American Anthropological Association 2021). Long-term ethnographic engagements with local communities made up of actual and acting people provide the base for the understanding of key political matters that will only grow more urgent in the decades to come: migration, integration, and the social impact of climate change. Our number is up, and it is time to act. The question remains, are we prepared for the task? Some recent publications suggest that our training and the structures of academic rewards have prevented the development of the skills required for public engagement, or discouraged those who had such skills from putting them on display (see for instance Borofsky 2019; McGranahan 2020; Fassin 2017). They argue that the style of academic communication that anthropologists are socialised into acts as an obstacle to the wider dispersal of our insights. It also affects our ability to engage constructively with each other (Billig 2013). Such 'Academese' (Borofsky 2011: 40) is ungainly in any self-proclaimed critical academic discipline (being difficult is, after all, the easy way out). To anthropologists, leaning towards the involute should be particularly unpalatable (or, put in non-Academese, 'write clearly'), since our empirical material is so singularly open to empathy and co-imagination (see, for instance, Narayan 2012; Fassin 2017: 7–8). Historians pride themselves on the fact that any reasonably enlightened layperson can read their publications. There is no reason why anthropology, so wonderfully rich in that prized

asset of 'good stories' (Kolshus 2017, 2018), should not be equally accessible and appealing. A discipline that can be made understandable is perfectly shaped to contribute to further understanding.

So, it would seem that the stage is set for a much more extroverted anthropology. Research communication courses are already included in a number of graduate programmes. Changing the prestige structure that has confused obscurity with profundity and forced us to turn the blame for not comprehending the incomprehensible onto ourselves, so delightfully dissected by Ellen Hertz (2016), might take longer. Yet, with a new generation driven by a desire to be understood, reward structures that promote intellectual haziness, and communicative introversion should eventually go out with a whimper—at least if it is joined by a corresponding revaluation of merit in academic hiring, as Borofsky (2019) advocates, and as the recent modification to the AAA assessment criteria encourages. However, even though the attitude towards popularising efforts seems about to change, it will take time and concerted effort to give anthropology a public presence. For anthropological insights to become a difference that makes a difference, individual anthropologists as well as anthropological institutions must deliberately seek media platforms and other public venues that reach people who have not actively sought such insights. As I show below, this can be agonising. Not only because it is frustrating to realise that even our best reasoning can fall on deaf ears and barren ground, but, also, because we will at times be met with counterarguments that we have not been exposed to within the relative safety of peer exchanges. Some of these will even defy the apodictic, notions that we hold to be so unquestionably true that questioning them usually will rebound on the questioner while leaving the target unscathed.

When communicating beyond our ranks, challenges to these truths will regularly surface. Being forced into such reflexive detours—'How do we know what we know?'—is nothing if not healthy since it bolsters intellectual vigilance. Public engagement can simply be epistemologically invigorating (see Kirch 2018). However, this requires acts of genuine reflection. We rightfully pride ourselves on how anthropology can contribute to destabilising the familiar, unleashing cultural creativity as well as uncovering naturalised power structures (frequently two sides of the same coin). A similar destabilisation of anthropologists' professional doxa might occur through deliberately reflexive public engagements. In turn, this will deepen the impact and widen the audience of anthropology-inspired interventions.

This is where I enter the fray based on my experience with public anthropology in Norway over the past 15 years. I take my cue from Matti Bunzl's (2008: 54) sobering challenge from one of several earlier rounds of concern for public anthropology: 'If progressive punditry is in fact possible, then how do we explain the persistent failure of [the] contemporary anthropologist … to play a more prominent role in the public sphere?'. My tentative answer is that in Norway, the approximately 2000 trained anthropologists (of whom around 200 are employed as researchers) have become collectively typecast as progressive lefties who wilfully disregard any possible virtue in other perspectives. Acknowledging that such a (mis)comprehension exists, I show how this has affected my own approach to media engagements and public debates. Inspired by Joel Robbins (2013) and Sherry Ortner (2016), I will also point to some developments in the anthropological classificatory apparatus that relate to notions of privilege and victimhood. A number of these are not attuned to finer local

nuances, since they are formed with reference to US-conceived middle-range theories (Merton 1968; cf. Knauft 2019), particularly related to identity and 'race' (see Andersson 2018), designed for a specific empirical context. However, since the most prestigious journals are US based, such proviso are frequently forgotten and peer reviews request framings that threaten to restrict rather than release the empirical potential. An anecdotal illustration will suffice at this point: A colleague recently submitted an article on poverty and demographic changes in a multicultural inner-city community to a high-ranking US-based journal, discussing why families moved elsewhere as soon as they had reached a certain size and income level. The principal reasons for relocating mentioned by the interlocutors were the low quality of the local school, a sense of insecurity caused by a high percentage of communal housing for residents suffering from substance abuse, and a shortage of larger apartments that could accommodate the needs of growing families. The manuscript was accepted on the condition that the author characterised this as 'white flight', to which my colleague grudgingly agreed after initial protests. This was in spite of the 'flight' being income-based and consequently a matter of class rather than ethnicity, evident in the fact that poor ethnic Norwegians remained while more affluent families with an immigrant background moved out as soon as they could. One thing is that such conceptual override prevents ethnographic challenges to the limits of these theories. More immediately problematic to anthropological relevance is how the analytic outcome lacks accuracy. All of the causes for moving brought up by my colleague's research can be addressed politically. 'White flight', on the other hand, is merely a label—and a heavily moralising and depoliticising one at that. In the Norwegian public domain, these tendencies

have caused us to lose authority, since parts of the wider audience fail to recognise those points made because the analytical tools are not calibrated to the purpose.[2]

At the core is the question of trust. A big and unwieldy notion, surely, and, to some, just bringing it to the table in this phantasmagoric age of post-facts and fake news will sound preposterously naïve. I will nonetheless insist that attention to trust, and how to steward it, is crucial for any publicly engaged anthropology. It is also part of epistemological reflexivity, which includes awareness of analytical biases. As anthropologists, sensitive to nuances, we know that most issues come in shades of grey. By making this explicit, we are not easily compartmentalised, and, therefore, not easily dismissed as epistemologically predestined to reach certain conclusions. Consequently, those instances that actually *are* unequivocally black and white will stand out more clearly. Still sceptical? Consider this: When was the last time you paid proper attention to someone who referred to themselves as an evolutionary psychologist? In what follows, I show that, to an increasing part of the Norwegian public, sociocultural anthropology has become just as easily sidelined.

## FRONTLINES AND FAULT LINES

As far as anthropology's public presence is concerned, Norway has usually been singled out, either as a beacon of hope or, more soberingly, as a cultural survival, 'the remnant of the discipline's past glory' (Fassin 2017: 2). Since Fredrik Barth's mesmerising appearances on national television in the late seventies, a string of anthropologists with distinguished academic careers, such as Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Unni Wikan, and Marianne Gullestad,

have brought anthropological insights and ethnographic comparative perspectives to a range of Norwegian publics. Sometimes the engagements were light-hearted and teasing, sometimes they were solemn or even literally dead serious. We in the audience fell for the curious blend of enthusiasm and urgency, declaring 'this is something people need to hear!', even though the messenger usually was an expert on topics and places far removed from the lives of most Norwegians (Howell 2010; Bringa and Bendixen 2016). During the nineties, 'social anthropology … arguably [became] the most visible academic profession in the mainstream mass media' (Eriksen 2003: 3).

My own immersion in public debate had been incremental, starting with public talks and lectures, via occasional radio appearances and the odd newspaper comment, before becoming a newspaper columnist.[3] The commentaries I wrote for the financial daily *Dagens Næringsliv* did not include an online comments option, whilst the readership would mostly consist of public servants, politicians, and professionals. I, therefore, had the privilege of being playful and sometimes essayistically equivocal, trusting that readers would appreciate not being told what to think. Occasionally, my pieces would cause a stir. After mildly criticising a famous comedian for a joke he made on his talk show about a kosher diet, the front page of both national tabloids featured pictures of him with the headline 'Accused of antisemitism!', followed by radio and television debates on the limits of humour. Twitter-active friends reported intense discussions, in which anthropologists in general were accused of underestimating people's ability to take a joke for just a joke. It was not until I started writing for *Aftenposten*, Norway's largest daily, that I was exposed to the full thrust of the new digital media reality, for which social media

shares, average reading time, and comments for the online versions were quantifiable indicators of success. My first contribution was a tongue-in-cheek analysis of how 'challenge' had replaced 'problem' in politician lingo. It struck a chord, beyond even the ranks of political cynics. The second column was informed by anthropology and fatherhood in equal measure, arguing that the overprotection of kids and 'the capacity to worry' had become a new standard for assessing an individual's moral standing, and that for the sake of our children we all needed to be less concerned with optimising their childhood. It was a resounding success. Hubris-charged, I threw all caution overboard and decided to write about gender equality for International Women's Day, arguing that the Norwegian man was the freest creature to ever walk the Earth and that it was the women's liberation movement that had set him (well, me) free. Most of the next two days were spent in shell-shocked sleeplessness over the keyboard, overwhelmed by an avalanche of abuse. The gist of it was: emasculated 'cultural Marxist'[4] anthropologist had no business coming here and telling proper men what to do or how to feel about themselves; once Norwegians were Vikings, now we are weaklings; but, deep down, everyone knows that women prefer the old Adam to this new amorphic version; and I could take my mindless relativism and stick it!

I had been woefully unprepared and, for that, I was deeply embarrassed. First and foremost, for failing to realise that I wrote as a generic Norwegian man without considering how my urban middle-class position obviously affected my outlook. Once I resurfaced from this immersion, I decided to take fieldnotes on my participation in the comments sections of particularly contentious contributions—that is, those that discussed gender, multicultural issues, or 'Norwegian values'.[5] I had already

planned to write my next column on the differences between the three Scandinavian countries' public debates on questions related to immigration and integration. I showed how Swedes seemed to actively subdue certain topics and cases (see Kurkiala 2016) and argued that this, in the longer term, would pose a challenge to the public trust in the media, academia, and government. The outcome was interesting, since it apparently confused the usual suspects in the comments section. A sensible anthropologist? They must have missed something. I followed up by experimenting with changing the byline information, from anthropologist to father, associate professor, soccer coach, and Oslo resident, amongst others. Those contributions that had the clearest political sting against causes associated with left-wing politics brought the most attention and positive feedback. Someone would inevitably turn up and remind others that I was, in fact, an anthropologist, so when they agreed with me, they must have misread me. These experiences were as troubling as they were interesting. I nevertheless dismissed them as part of an online community culture, with some justification. I had been (and still am) critical towards tendencies of disregarding the opinions of 'disgruntled white men' by default, but for the sake of my own sanity it did at times seem legitimate to do so. Their prejudices could surely not be widely held?

## AUDIENCE LOST

It was not until the fiftieth anniversary of the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo in 2014 that I realised how our public standing had changed. During the week-long celebrations, the strong tradition of public anthropology featured prominently in the department's self-presentation, in international guests' addresses, and also in the Norwegian

media. A feature story in the highbrow weekly *Morgenbladet* was complemented by several dedicated programmes on national radio's main science show and a string of articles devoted to anthropology in *Aftenposten*'s science section. In my contribution to the article series, I discussed how anthropology had come to reach such a prominent position in the Norwegian public sphere, pointing to the favourable interaction between outstanding research communicators and Norwegians' long-standing international orientation, manifest in development aid initiatives, Christian foreign mission organisations, and seafaring and shipping traditions. I also mentioned that some now apparently had come to regard us as part of the left-leaning politically correct elite, with lopsided contributions to public debates. I made it clear that, to those of us who knew the discipline's wealth of perspectives, this impression was faulty, nonetheless offering some reasons why the relationship between the discipline and its formerly devoted public no longer seemed as cordial: 1) The playfulness that characterised the decade that followed the end of the Cold War caused by a feeling of facing a historic blank slate where everything was possible ended abruptly with 9/11. 2) Curiosity about the lives of other peoples was no longer seen as essential for understanding our own. 3) We anthropologists had probably too often referred to the 'majority population' as an undifferentiated category, which rendered us class blind and ignored the significant cultural differences within Norway and thus inadvertently helped to confirm the myth of pre-immigration cultural homogeneity currently haunting Norwegian integration debates. 4) Studies of Norwegian minorities had not been sufficiently methodically ambitious, where in particular a lack of language skills constituted such a serious shortcoming that

Eriksen's (2013: 51) characterisation of this as a 'professional scandal' seemed apt. And, 5) anthropologists had not acknowledged the fact that, in some urban areas, the lives of 'majority Norwegians' had undergone such major changes over a relatively short period of time that today their lives share a number of the traits we associate with a minority existence. My upbeat conclusion saluted the virtue of curiosity and promised that anthropology should remain recognisably unpredictable in the coming fifty years as well. Amongst colleagues, the diagnosis was largely met with a shrug and the odd pat on the shoulder. From the readership, however, the response was overwhelming, exceeding anything I had previously written. Some of the input was definitely on the rougher side, rejoicing in anthropologists' self-inflicted trouble and full of glee over the prospect of an anthropology-free future. The vast majority, however, was thoughtful, nuanced, and strikingly personal. A large portion came from people working in the public sector, many with an expertise in the integration of immigrants. They all revealed an early fascination for anthropology, for knowledge of peoples of the world, and for surprising comparisons and juxtapositions. Enthusiasm had dwindled as anthropologists, according to a number of those who wrote me, failed to point out that the ethical obligation to seek conviviality with and understanding of your fellow human was a two-way street. Anthropologists' attitudes seemed to be that We were supposed to understand Them, and We were supposed to understand that They could not understand Us. The odd counter-voices who had painted a more complex picture of the processes of integration had been treated poorly by fellow anthropologists. Many either explicitly or implicitly mentioned how we had met Unni Wikan's work and public engagements. She had addressed how Norwegian policies on

multicultural issues seemed to either leave patriarchal tendencies among Norway's immigrant population to pass or even outright facilitating them (Wikan 1999, 2001, 2008). Her academic and public contributions had shown the relevance of knowledge from faraway regions to understand the situation at home. Reactions from some of her colleagues were vile (see Wikan 2017 for an account), and were obviously noted by those engaged members of the public. Disenchantment had now set in, and if they wanted solid knowledge applicable for the specific challenges they were facing, they would look to other academic disciplines, since we consistently failed to ask the questions for which they needed answers. Two things were apparent: first, disappointment in anthropology for not completing the work of making everyone equally 'native', subject to the same expectations and thus open for a more radical equality; second, a related suspicion that fields and topics existed which anthropologists were careful to avoid, allegedly because we feared the answers we would get (what Fassin (2013) calls 'the black holes of ethnography')—or that when we actually engage with these questions, the findings we present subdue possibly troublesome data. The underlying tone was one of trust, or rather the loss thereof, from people who truly wanted to believe us, and who knew how to weigh two mutually excluding principles and opt for one, whilst acknowledging some virtues in the other.

According to Elie Wiesel, the opposite of love is not hatred but indifference. Judging by the overwhelming response it was obvious that people were far from indifferent. So I took the time to respond carefully. This also gave me plenty of time to think. Did they have a point? I decided to follow anthropological interventions in the public debate even more closely. One factor that soon became apparent was the perception of cultural relativism. To anthropologists, this is a methodological principle and a prerequisite for grasping the connections and valuations that make people do what they do. In Norwegian public discourse, however, it had become synonymous with moral relativism, characterised by the prejudice of lowered expectations, by which we do not ascribe to others the same capacities of understanding and empathy that we attribute to and expect from ourselves, followed by a general licence to disregard any virtue 'Norwegian culture' might hold. This impression was not entirely without substance. For instance, an anthropology professor of Western European origin declared that the national day celebrations on May 17, a boisterous spectacle with school children's parades that Norwegians compare favourably to shows of military might present in many other national day celebrations, is matched only by the totalitarian autocracy in North Korea.[6] It was, admittedly, a refreshing comparative reflection that might have served a purpose—if the professor later in the interview had not underlined that she always fled town and had never actually seen, let alone taken part in, the celebrations she so readily denounced, showing that anthropological training by no means inoculates one against either prejudice or empirically shoddy conjectures. When a Pew Research Center (2018) survey found Norwegians to be more prone than other Western Europeans to agree with the proposition that 'our culture is not perfect, but it is better than others', anthropologists who were approached for comments were quick to label this cultural chauvinism. At first glance, it seems like the obvious conclusion. However, the same survey showed that the respondents had a very broad notion of Norwegian-ness, significantly more open than any of their Western European counterparts. The upbeat

message that the inclusive patriotism that has been described in other parts of the world (see, for instance, McDougall 2016) is not necessarily an oxymoron, not even soon after the moral panic caused by the so-called 'European refugee crisis' of 2015, merits curiosity. What can only be called a prejudiced anthropological framing made the public miss some truly interesting discussions, whilst anthropologists' lack of real interest prevented the softening of some hardened truths. A cynic could be forgiven for thinking that to anthropologists good news is unwelcome. More disturbingly, it seemed that the journalists had approached anthropologists in search of this precise answer.

In 2015, I was trapped by a similarly restraining framing after several thousand Syrian refugees crossed the Russian–Norwegian border by bike (see Naguib 2017). A handful of the asylum seekers were married girls under the age of consent who were either pregnant or had their children with them. After registration, they had consequently been forcibly separated from their husbands who faced prosecution for statutory rape. The reporting caused a public outcry, and the case inevitably ended up on *Dagsnytt 18*, the main current affairs debate programme. Having unsuccessfully searched for willing experts on the Middle East, the producers eventually asked me to shed some light on the subject. I was quite clear about what I could and could not say, emphasising that this was counter to Syrian law and custom and had to be regarded as a consequence of the desperate and precarious situation characterising crowded refugee camps. The anchor seemed pleased and informed me that I would be facing a representative from Save the Children, an international nongovernmental organisation. Right before we went on air, the programme was introduced with the following teaser: 'Pregnant 14-year-old mother of one crosses northern border. "Let

her stay with her husband", says anthropologist.' My heart sank. Nothing I had said during the research briefing had been anything near this pitch. Still, the most competent news producers in the country obviously found that this was something anthropologists were likely to say. The showdown they had set the stage for, between the relativist anthropologist and the universalist champion of children's rights, came to naught, since we were in full agreement over both the causes of this situation and what was the best way to deal with the consequences. The anchor grew ever more impatient in his attempts to sow discord between us. From an editorial point of view, this 12-minute headline debate fell flat on its face. To me, it felt like a mission accomplished. I had brought up some crucial nuances to a case that otherwise invited moral condemnation of Syrian men, or the demonisation of Syrian culture, or Islam, or all three. Then, reactions started ticking in. A few appreciated my efforts. To most, it seemed that everything I had said had been filtered through the self-confirming programme pitch.[7] Anthropologists, in general, were accused of being apologists for any barbaric practice as long as it could be labelled 'culture', converting ugly ducklings of abuse into beautiful swans beyond reproach, whilst this tolerance for the suffering endured by some in the name of culture clearly showed anthropology's state of moral bankruptcy.

## A CHANGE IN ANTHROPOLOGY'S CULTURE?

Since I knew what I had actually said, the comments did not hurt as much as they probably were intended to do. This freed intellectual space for reflection. It seemed clear that anthropologists had become the go-to people when a certain pitch was required, in the same

way that evolutionary psychologists are the contact-of-choice whenever you need someone to say that 'in evolutionary terms, the stone-age ended just hours ago, so [*insert conservative topic of choice here*] is consistent with our true nature.' This is the essence of anthropology's media typecasting. It is confirmed whenever anthropologists deliver according to a tacit script of what anthropologists are expected to say because of our alleged epistemological override, whilst nuance and exception are siphoned off. Still, was this mainly the media's fault? Given the reactions to the Oslo department's anniversary piece a year earlier, and a clear feeling that popular perception regarding anthropology had changed, I began wondering whether my critics were onto something that I, being in the midst of things, had missed. Had there been an epistemological change that calibrated our analyses in a slightly new way? To me, who belonged to the large student cohort of the early nineties, it was anthropology's light-heartedly serious intellectual leaps and surprising comparisons that had initially appealed to me. The collapse of the Berlin wall had made us Cold War kids believe that our world was rebooting, and everything was possible. By displaying the vast diversity of humankind, anthropology academically condoned this conviction. Our message simply fit the spirit of time like a glove (Eriksen 2005; Eriksen and Stein 2017), and there seemed to be no clouds on the horizon for either anthropology or society. However, two articles addressing recent disciplinary history suggest that this sense of deep relief and endless opportunity were not as strong on the Western side of the Atlantic. Sherry Ortner (2016: 61) wrote, 'the real world in the 1990s was getting darker, as the promise of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s began to fade, and as young people born in the 1960s and 1970s were beginning to experience the beginning of

the end of "the American Dream"'. What she calls 'dark anthropology', which emphasises power dimensions, oppression, and the 'harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them' (49), displaced more culture-oriented issues. Joel Robbins (2013) points to a similar trend in anthropological representations, by which people who would previously be associated with what Michel-Rolph Trouillot labelled 'the savage slot' were portrayed from the 1980s onwards as victims of colonisation and neoliberalism in what Robbins (2013: 448) calls 'the suffering slot'. This shift discarded the use of difference for intellectual life and self-understanding (Robbins 2013: 454). Expanding Robbins' point, I find that the reflexivity resulting from the distortive mirror effect demands a more radical equality than that allowed by the restricting notion of victimhood: the life of 'the savage' is different and precisely, therefore, something to learn from, whilst life for 'the suffering' is just a poorer version of our own and thus has little else to offer except for bad conscience. Robbins (2013: 456) summarises, 'suffering slot ethnography is secure in its knowledge of good and evil and works toward achieving progress in the direction of its already widely accepted models of the good'. On this point, Robbins fruitfully converges with the air of disappointment in many of the responses to my Oslo department anniversary diagnosis. The consequence of suffering slot ethnography is that the basis of anthropology's radically comparative project dissolves, since guilt is not compatible with equality. It is displaced in favour of comparison along the one-dimensional inequality axis of over-privileged versus underprivileged. Only some seem worthy of our full understanding, leaving general curiosity as collateral damage.

The 'suffering slot' classificatory apparatus was set in motion when a father in one of the most ethnically diverse Oslo suburbs was interviewed for *Aftenposten*, saying that his children were being mocked by schoolmates with Muslim backgrounds for having salami in their lunch boxes. Two anthropologists immediately contacted the principals of all the primary schools in the area. Soon, they could almost triumphantly report that none of the principals were familiar with the story, which consequently, according to them, must be false. What is important is not whether the salami affair was true, even though my children's experience from our ethnically and culturally diverse local school in the inner city of Oslo meant that I did not bat an eyelid at the father's account. The bottom line is that no anthropologist would have questioned, much less publicly attacked, a story about students who were being bullied for *not* eating salami. Thus, we were not allowed to empathise with the children of this family, even though the label 'majority' hardly covers their experiences at the level where we anthropologists have our strength—namely, the local—where people's lives are lived. The anthropologists' intervention made the binary opposition minority: majority: victim: abuser not even situationally reversed, let alone challenged. This also spared them the strain of revising their interpretive frame.

## CURIOSITY RESTRAINED?

Benjamin Teitelbaum's provocatively titled article, 'Collaborating with the radical right' (2019), features an equally provocative argument for an 'immoral anthropology'. Behind these deliberately standoffish expressions lie epistemological as well as ethical concerns crucial to both 'pure' academic anthropology and its public guise. The provocative framing

possibly eclipses a crucial point, namely, that exposure to other ways of seeing things can have a transformative effect (McGranahan 2020: 3). But, being a feedback loop that includes a number of intellectual digestive processes, the outcome is usually quite different from the input. Teitelbaum's account, inadvertently illustrated by the non-engaging approach of several of the invited comments to the article, shows that there is a clear limit about what anthropologists ought to be curious. It almost seems as if an ambition to document right-wing perceptions of the world is suspect by default. Susan Harding (1991) reported similar attitudes surrounding her studies of Southern Baptists, which she refers to as 'anthropology's repugnant other', those whose worlds do not merit description from the native's point of view. Like Teitelbaum, I hold that anthropologists should reign in any such tendency, if only for the sake of the social science division of labour. Methodologically, Arlie Russell Hochschild's *Strangers in Their Own Land* (2018 [2016]), which provided some critical clues for understanding how a man of questionable intellect and unquestionably poor moral standing could be elected president of the most powerful nation on Earth, belongs squarely to our domain. Is it a coincidence that it was written by a sociologist, who had taken to heart the social science tenet that, in order to change the world, you first must understand and explain it?[8] Or was this omission actively reproduced through tacit disciplinary notions that some people or certain topics are not worthy of our attention? In *Shiv Sena Women* (2007), Atreyee Sen shows how poor, slum-dwelling women have the agency to be vile Hindu fundamentalists, spurring their men on in perpetuating xenophobic attacks on Muslims and non-Marathis. Even though they could be explained away, with reference to false consciousness or the misdirected anger

of the disenfranchised, such empirical nuances nonetheless destabilise established notions of victimhood. They will also cause a sense of 'moral and epistemic uncontrol' (Teitelbaum 2019: 432). To a discipline that prides itself on displaying the complexities of lifeworlds, it would be quite paradoxical if there were not frequent collisions between the needs and interests of one group and those of another.[9]

## THE WAY BACK TO TRUST

In hindsight, the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, proved a watershed to most Norwegians' receptiveness to anthropological perspectives, as the world and its peoples went from being mostly intriguing to being mostly intimidating (see, among others, Eriksen and Stein 2017; Abu-Lughod 2016). Such grand narratives tend to overshadow other factors. These have undoubtedly been less significant. But, unlike the global security situation, they are conditions we as a professional community can do something about. The reason I include Ortner and Robbins[10] in an article about the role of public anthropology in Norway is that the tendencies they point to have also provided direction to Norwegian research and, in turn, to the dissemination of our findings and insights to a wider audience. This is not surprising, given that American anthropology by virtue of its size necessarily will lie at the centre of theory development and influence what research topics are in vogue. The impact is deepened by the academic reward structure and hiring practices that encourage publication in the most frequently cited journals, the vast majority of which are US-based. The consequence is that theories and perspectives developed in an American context flow more effortlessly across the Atlantic than they otherwise might have, despite some of them bearing the

unmistakable mark of being middle-range theories (Merton 1968), conceived for the purpose of specific empirical phenomena, and consequently are culture-inflected products with a distinct historical origin and semantic backdrop. Displaced from their original context and applied over other empirical materials, the analytical points will often be familiar and consequently readily accepted by those who want to believe the message. To others, they will be ever so slightly off the mark, resulting in a number of 'yes, buts'. With every intervention that fails due to such uncalibrated tools, credibility suffers. Eventually, the audience will look for answers elsewhere.[11]

This text was written in an age when the virtues of an encompassing public discourse seem to be an issue of hope rather than conviction. National news outlets present versions of the world that not only seem to be mutually exclusive, but, even more troublingly, have remarkably little overlap. Meanwhile, social media as the site of non-hierarchical public discourse has morphed into either intellectual monocultures or sarcasm-dripping mudslinging contests, leaving us more concerned with not saying anything that could be taken the wrong way than with saying anything that might actually be important (Kolshus 2018). The realistic conclusion is that attempts to re-establish public arenas for enlightened debate are bound to fail. Realism has never been my strong suit. Therefore, I have argued that anthropologists should have a go at it, beginning with the observation that we seem eager to engage and questioning whether we are rigged to do so, and whether we are ready to take advantage of the opportunities that arise from public engagements. I hold that we have thwarted the radical anthropological project of making everyone equally exotic, equally cultural, equally native, and equally comparable, since

the insistence on power inequality has blunted the potential of comparisons as cultural critique. Interventions that, for instance, could challenge the intellectual imperialism of biologisms on cultural and psychological phenomena, which are spurred on by pharmaceutical companies and the wider medical industry, are consequently easily compartmentalised. The main lesson from the fate of Norwegian public anthropology is that authority through trust can be squandered. It is a loss to Norwegian anthropologists, because we miss out on the reflexive corrections that will prevent intellectual arthritis. However, I find that it is a greater loss to the public, who lose the hope-inducing reminder that other lives are worth living, that there are alternatives, and that these alternatives are viable, because we humans are the ones living them. This message is lost if empirical complexity is rendered monochrome. Without us, the world simply seems less accepting of diversity for all.

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## NOTES

1   I am grateful to Carol McGranahan, Paige West, Rahul Ranjan, my colleagues and friends at the Diversity Studies Centre Oslo (DISCO) at Oslo Metropolitan University, and the editors of this journal for their constructive feedback on earlier versions of this manuscript. Obstinacy prevents me from taking full benefit of their comments.

2   This point mirrors Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1999) rhetorically powerful critique of the universalisation of culture-specific North American concepts by proxy of social science theory, which Wacquant (2022) recently expanded into a book-length argument. With our long-standing sensitivity to how the localisation of all migrating phenomena involves cultural adaptation and consequent modification, anthropologists are better positioned than any other social scientists to acknowledge the challenges of travelling concepts—even though early on Sartori (1970) pointed out the challenge posed by 'conceptual stretch' for comparative political science in terms that anthropologists will readily recognise.

3   The empirical foundation for this essay is experiences from a wide range of media engagements. I have been a newspaper columnist in the pink-sheet *Dagens Næringsliv* (circulation 80 000), and, since 2013, in the largest Norwegian daily newspaper, *Aftenposten* (circulation 250 000); contributed to developing the counter-factual *Anti-Panel* and its successor *What If*, with weekly 30-min slots on *Ekko*, national radio's primary science show; and have on average weekly contributions to a range of other media platforms with nationwide reach, occasionally on issues related to Vanuatu and Oceania, which is my ethnographic field of expertise, but usually more general anthropology-inspired commentary on life and society.

4   This term was used repeatedly in the 'manifesto' written by Anders Behring Breivik before the 22 July 2011 terrorist attack. It connotes political traitors and like-minded actors as undermining the nation state and abetting the cultural and racial genocide of the Norwegian people.

5   As has been experienced by many fieldworkers over the years, taking fieldnotes became a therapeutic tool by providing some analytic distance to emotionally charged experiences (see for instance Sanjek 1990). I have written two articles and one essay in Norwegian that discuss different aspects of this 'comments-field fieldwork', including my attempts to see the world from my detractors' (usually white, cis-gender, middle-aged men, like myself) points of view.

6   The virtually worldwide defunding of university anthropology over the past two decades has caused an increasingly international faculty in Norwegian anthropology departments. How this has impacted anthropology's position in society is not addressed here. Suffice it to say that institutional responsibility for reproducing a culture for public outreach should be a centrepiece rather than an afterthought and include explicit incentives.

7  The intensity of Twitter abuse more than compensated for the lack of discord in the television studio. When Tweeters moved on from Syrian child brides to asking how I would feel about my own underage kids being raped by their spouses on a regular basis, the moment had come to leave the platform for good. Twitter and I had not been much of a match in the first place.

8  In a classic article on how to shed anthropology of its colonial legacy, Diane Lewis (1973) pointed to European anthropology's historical attention to its own home turf, which she referred to as 'native ethnography'. This included studies of 'majorities', something Marianne Gullestad (1984, 2002) also encouraged repeatedly.

9  This is already recognised in the first point regarding the AAA code of ethics: 'Anthropologists may choose to link their research to the promotion of well-being, social critique, or advocacy. As with all anthropological work, determinations regarding what is in the best interests of others or what kinds of efforts are appropriate to increase well-being are value-laden and should reflect sustained discussion with others concerned' (https://www.americananthro.org/LearnAndTeach/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=22869).

10  These two articles have been discussed as a pair by a range of contributors over the past years and have also been subject to special issues of journals and widespread commentary.

11  Anthropology is currently rather far from its former position as 'the most visible academic profession in the mainstream mass media' (Eriksen 2003: 3). This is partly due to concerted efforts from the professional organisations of our social science cousins, most notably sociologists and psychologists, which have encouraged public engagements on a broad scale. Since these outnumber anthropologists by a wide margin, one could always argue that our current presence is proportional. It should be clear by now that I believe we should aim higher.

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# ANTHROPOLOGY AT AN INTERSECTION. A REPORT FROM 'RELATIONS AND BEYOND: THE CONFERENCE OF THE FINNISH ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY'

The Conference of the Finnish Anthropological Society, held in Rovaniemi, a few kilometres south of the Arctic Circle, marked my return to the realm of face-to-face scholarly gatherings since the start of the pandemic. Taking part in the fervent exchange of ideas and copious discussions was a riveting experience. All this transpired within the cramped hallways of Arktikum, a peculiar architectural amalgam of 1930s totalitarian art deco and utopian glass domes, a seemingly unsuitable venue for an assembly of roughly 300 anthropologists. Yet, despite the spatial constraints, the deft conference team pulled off a remarkable feat, orchestrating a successful affair. It was an environment teeming with off-script encounters and incessant confabulation. After several years of screen-mediated anthropology, the intensity of it all felt intoxicating.

The panels showcased the vibrancy and vigour of the discipline in this moment. While some of the papers were firmly placed in the 'suffering slot', content to describe the predicament of research participants, many others examined how people find creative ways to resist structural and intersectional factors that form those predicaments. Here, I'll mention a few that I found especially inspiring.

Elena Palma talked about riverine practices in Alto Bio-Bio, Chile, where a group of Mapuche-Pehuence women have taken up white-water rafting. Such an activity is usually associated with the commodification of nature, combining watersports and ritual communication with the nonhuman inhabitants of the river in order to represent and respect the river's interests in a context of state-sponsored large-scale extractive projects in the area.

Dienke Stomph delivered a paper on her research, which explores how the practice of Capoeira Angola—one of the original tactics of resistance against plantations—could be used to decolonise human–soil relations in Dutch agriculture. Maroonage—the escape from slavery and plantation—becomes a map for the anthropologist to find routes out of the Plantationocene, and a way to engage with the soil revitalisation practices of Dutch farmers.

Isabel Bredenbröker and Adam Pultz Melbye outlined their fascinating plan to queer the ethnographic artefacts in museums by creating a multitude of representations out of them. Based on the unique material characteristics of the objects, more specifically, they explore how to amplify and condense different frequencies of sounds and use a genetic algorithm that helps in the curation process of these sonic representations.

The three keynotes of the conference were delivered by anthropological heavyweights Piers Vibetsky (who delivered the Westermarck Lecture at the conference), Marilyn Strathern (one of the keynote speakers), and Tim Ingold (the second keynote speaker). I won't go into

these lectures and talks here, but we hope to publish them in a subsequent issue of *Suomen Antropologi* in future.

The last day of the conference was opened by a roundtable discussion featuring Florian Stammler (chair of the organising committee), Vibetsky, Strathern, and Ingold. An audience member—Ivan Tacey from the University of Plymouth—seized the moment to interrogate the panellists on a pertinent matter. Namely, Tacey asked why all of the anthropologists on the stage had conspicuous ties to Cambridge, undermining the panel's—and, by implication, the conference's—representativeness of the diversity of contemporary anthropological scholarship. The question was met with a round of applause from the audience, indicating a resonance with many of the participants.

Whilst Strathern accepted the question as germane, and argued that the discipline should reflect the reproduction of job opportunities within itself, Ingold and Vibetsky appeared to deem the criticism irrelevant, downplaying their ties to Cambridge anthropology. Moreover, Vibetsky closed with a quip: 'everywhere else is welcome to become their own invasive species, so maybe Finnish anthropology will colonise the world in its turn.'[1] Given the emphasis on decolonising knowledge structures and anthropology itself, which was evident in so many papers at the conference, this was a rather surprising retort.

I do not think—of course, and probably neither does Vibetsky—that the aim is to replace one colonial structure with another, nor is it possible as long as anthropologists on top of academic hierarchies are unwilling to thoroughly examine their position of privilege and power. Maybe this could happen—please allow me to push the metaphor a bit further—if we had the anthropological equivalent of

Roundup to kill off all of the outdated scholarly traditions from the old colonial centres of power.

For me personally, an ideal candidate for an anthropological Roundup is the concept of intersectionality, which brings me to another exchange during the discussion that I personally found the most intellectually stimulating. It started with Strathern's remark on the limitations of anthropological concepts, based on a comment she had heard during the panels. The comment was about how our concepts limit the possibilities of our understanding, upon which Strathern remarked that concepts can also be ungainly and downright ugly (her example, 'Euro-American'). She continued, arguing that these kinds of concepts—which she called 'horrible hybrids'—are important in pushing the limits of our thinking.

A few minutes later, Tim Ingold remarked that intersectionality is the 'ugliest word I've heard for a long time' in the social sciences, going on to describe the concept as 'absolutely ghastly' and 'dreadful'. He seemed to call for an increased sensitivity to the use of concepts in general, claiming that 'we are careless and clumsy about the way in which we recycle words and phrases often without thinking about what they really mean'.[2] At first, I interpreted Ingold's remark as a double-voiced comment on Strathern's call for ugly concepts, both agreeing to it in principle and disparaging of intersectional analysis. After discussing this with my partner, also an anthropologist working as an equality and non-discrimination expert, I came to agree with her take on the discussion, which was that, while Strathern made an epistemological point regarding anthropological analysis, Ingold seemed to merely state a preference, disregarding his position in the hierarchy of the discipline. We indeed need ungainly concepts, but merely expressing an

aesthetic judgement will not advance our analytical thinking, let alone help to dismantle the colonial structures of anthropology.

Thus, the conversation left me rather perplexed. In a discipline in dire need of decolonisation, which needs to be more representative of the multitude of social worlds it explores and reflect on its privilege, we had a panel full of white, entrenched, Cambridge-educated anthropologists. Furthermore, one of those panellists uses that platform to come up with three synonyms to characterise the disagreeability of a concept, which—and the whole panel was an indexical icon of how much this is true—the discipline desperately needs to move forward. Add the symbolic dimension—given the lack of monitor speakers on stage, the panel members could hardly hear the audience questions, while the questions rang clear and true around the rest of the auditorium—and the setting was complete.

It is high time for the 'turn' to intersectional anthropology from the peripheries.

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## NOTES

1  'Invasive species' was a riposte to Tacey's characterisation of Cambridge anthropology replicating itself around the world as 'rhizomes or seeds blowing in the wind'.
2  Moreover, while Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first to describe a subject's experience as 'intersectional', the word is not novel to the English language, as Ingold claimed. The Oxford English Dictionary dates the word 'intersectional' back to a mid-nineteenth century book on architecture.

# BOOK REVIEW

The book *Music, Dance, Anthropology,* edited by Stephen Cottrell, offers us an interesting selection of articles related to the anthropology of music and dance, or what in Finland is called ethnomusicology. The anthropology of music and its British scholars have been influential in global developments in the discipline through the works of scholars such as John Blacking and others. The book reflects the historical developments of the discipline and its links to anthropology. This edited collection consists of 11 chapters and an introduction. The chapters are divided into two parts, with the first looking at the histories, theories, and concepts related to the anthropology of music or ethnomusicology, and the second focusing on regional insights.

One thing that caught my attention at first when I looked at the authors featured in this book was that almost all of them were from British universities. The reason for this emphasis was revealed when reading the introduction. This book represents work completed under the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI) and its ethnomusicology committee. This link has obviously influenced the papers represented in the book, with the starting point for it focusing on the academics and the work carried out under the aegis of the RAI. Therefore, the emphasis on British anthropology and its development is understandable.

Readers outside the UK might find it less interesting to read about the developments of ethnomusicology and choreography in the UK. For instance, including some American scholars in the book would have made it more appealing to a wider audience beyond the British Isles.

The book's publication was also impacted by a few of the authors, namely, Peter Cooke and Andrée Grau, passing away during the writing process, with those articles finalised by close colleagues. Since going through all of the articles in a short book review would be difficult, I have chosen some of the most intriguing articles to focus my attention on here.

For an anthropologist or an ethnomusicologist coming from outside the UK, the book's first article *The Royal Anthropological Institute and the Development of Ethnomusicology in the UK*, written by John Baily, serves as the opening for the first part of the book. Baily unwraps for the reader the historical developments of the Ethnomusicology Committee within RAI, also making note of the broader context. The main point in the article is perhaps highlighted in Baily's (p. 25) notion that in the UK ethnomusicology has developed within the context of 'theoretically rigorous' anthropology, leaving a remarkable imprint in the ethnomusicology found today in the UK.

In the second article, titled *The Legs That Put a Kick into Anthropology – Forerunners of 'the Anthropology of Dance'*, Andrée Grau examines the first half of the twentieth century's anthropological studies on music and dance linked to the RAI Ethnomusicology Committee. Grau, who passed away in 2017, examines specific individuals, such as dancers and dance scholars Beryl de Zoete and Katherine Dunham,

and islands influential in the history of the study of dance and choreography.

The third article, *How Musical is the Citizen?*, written by Martin Stokes, follows in John Blacking's footprints and updates or situates Blacking's classic book *How Musical is Man?* (1973), focusing on current themes in ethnomusicology from recent years. Stokes' text resembles a new introduction to the old classic.

The more practical and less history-driven part of the book begins with Chapter Four, written by Jerome Lewis. In his article, *Why Music Matters? Social Aesthetics and Cultural Transmission*, Lewis (p. 71) suggests that 'music appears to have greater resilience than language' and uses the BaYaKa people in Central Africa to illustrate this. His point is that music is well adapted to groups wishing to communicate collectively. As an example, he uses groups situated thousands of kilometres apart, recognising the communication built into the music. Lewis points out that evidence suggests that music both transmits and structures as well as maintains society over time. Ann R. David reflects on her two fieldwork periods and projects on Polish dancers in London and Hindu ritual practices, respectively. Reading about ethnographic work on dance and choreography is refreshing for an academic who does not follow studies of dance quite attentively. David compares her previous experience, where participation was considered essential, with the latter which prohibited the researcher's direct involvement, analysing the bodily experiences of each work. Through this set up, she provides a glimpse of how neural pathways and bodily proprioception provide us with in-depth knowledge gathered through, by, and in our bodies. In the article she can open up for us what the embodied practices might mean and how this has been seen in historical and current trajectories, while also raising a question regarding the importance of understanding the body's place in ethnographic work.

Barley Norton, on the other hand, offers researchers doing ethnographic fieldwork refreshing ideas about the possibilities offered through filmmaking and how it can be used as a medium in research. Norton (p. 121) points out that 'ethnomusicology with the film is part and parcel of doing better ethnomusicology', but at the same time, film has remained a marginal research tool. Ethnomusicologists have tended to use film as a documentation that only supports written text, an illustration of sorts. To change this outlook, Norton challenges us to think about what film could offer to our ethnographic work and presents different film strategies and montages.

In the second part of the book, Rachel Harris views the possibilities offered to ethnomusicology by soundscape studies in light of her fieldwork on Central Asian–Chinese and Islamic sounds. She worked with Uyghur Turkic Muslim communities in Xianjiang, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. I first questioned how Harris' use of data gathered via the internet and social media platforms could provide her with the necessary data on soundscapes. She used this data in addition to traditional fieldwork confidently, and understandably considering the potential danger that such data collection could cause if conducted traditionally. Harris (p. 149) explains that she found out that 'a focus on sound more broadly defined gave [her] greater freedom to think about a whole range of sounded and listening practices related to the expression and embodiment of Islamic faith and ideology'. She points out that the Islamic soundscape includes both ways of listening and bodily practices as well as temporal and spatial properties, which Muslims use to transform the public into private spaces.

In the eighth chapter, Carole Pegg examines the concepts of self and personhood among the musicians and shaman of southern Siberia through the lens of the performative body. Catherine Foley, however, focuses on the *sean nós* dancers of western Ireland. Both open up interesting ideas about performance and the body as part of it. These chapters are followed by a chapter by a Greek researcher, Maria Koutsoba, the only scholar residing outside the British Isles, despite her links to British universities. In her chapter, she focuses on traditional dance in Greece. The book concludes with Peter Cooke's chapter on music and patronage in the royal court of Buganda, which is now part of Uganda.

Even though anthropology and ethnomusicology have been and remain to an extent gendered disciplines with more male professors and researchers, it is nonetheless bracing to see that the gender balance amongst the authors is well maintained. The articles within the book are also sure to offer something interesting to all academic readers. Overall, the multiple perspectives that the book brings forth are a needed addition to the field of ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music and dance. Such books, representing this variety of disciplines and perspectives, are not often seen. Yet, the multiple perspectives nonetheless accompany and fill in gaps that other perspectives might have. Therefore, ignoring the emphasis on British academics, this book offers a much-needed addition to the academic bookshelf.

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HAGE, GHASSAN. *Diasporic Condition: Ethnographic Explorations of the Lebanese in the World*. University of Chicago Press. 2021. 219 pp. ISBN: 9780226546902 (cloth), ISBN: 9780226547060 (softcover), ISBN: 9780226547237 (ebook)

In his new monograph, *Diasporic Condition: Ethnographic Explorations of the Lebanese in the World*, Ghassan Hage argues that diasporic culture is the culture of capitalist modernity in Lebanon. As in his previous work, Hage works through his ethnographic material by drawing upon the critical tradition of Western philosophy and social science, most significantly, ideas from Spinoza and Bourdieu. Through this, he composes for the reader an intellectually stimulating description of the diasporic lifeworlds of his interlocutors. This monograph is based on fieldwork carried out amongst Lebanese hailing from the pseudonymous Christian villages of Jalleh and Mehj, one situated in the north of the country and another closer to Beirut. The book's ethnography ventures from these locations along transnational village and kinship connections to diasporic locations in Australia and North and South America. Beyond familiarising the reader with diasporic Lebanese networks and locations through lucid and lively ethnographic prose, the book produces a compelling flurry of conceptual tools with broad relevance for rethinking issues related to the diaspora and migration. This is the sort of work that has benefited from tenure and a long career: although most of the fieldwork for the book was carried out in the early 2000s, it draws upon material from the 1990s through the 2010s, and illustrates the productivity of letting ethnographic material simmer and mature for a good decade of critical anthropological thinking before being brought together in a book.

*The Diasporic Condition* positions itself as a champion of the critical anthropological tradition that does not shy away from strategic exoticisation and the search for radical alterity, following Hage's *Alter-Politics* (2015), inspired by the work of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. Hage (2021: 3) summarises this perspective through the question, 'In what way does the study of a particular sociocultural phenomenon expand our knowledge of the plurality of modes of existing in the world?' This perspective stands slightly apart from the sociological and explanatory orientation often dominating studies of migration and diaspora. The latter has certainly been the case in studies of Lebanese migration and diaspora, a prolific topic for research amongst historians, but rather surprisingly not the subject of much anthropological attention as of late. More significantly, for those readers with a personal or professional interest in Lebanon, Hage frames his subject as the study of *the culture of Lebanese capitalist modernity*, and thus it has just as much to do with the comings and goings in Beirut or Mount Lebanon as with Lebanese communities in, say, New Bedford, USA. The book is certainly productive in working against banal methodological nationalism by consistently showing that the crossing of national boundaries (or the separations created by them) is not always the most significant transition or separation in the lifeworlds of our interlocutors, even when dealing with transnational themes.

The monograph is structured in nine chapters in addition to an introduction and a conclusion, all of which incorporate material from Hage's fieldwork across decades and some conceptual labour. The book reads as if composed of two parts, where the first five chapters focus on crafting conceptual tools for understanding the diasporic condition and the latter four chapters illustrate how these can provide us a more nuanced understanding of specific themes. Chapter one provides a historical overview of the emergence of Lebanese migration since the late nineteenth century through an examination of the penetration of global capitalism in the mountains of Lebanon. It argues that this process created an expanded, even global, *space of viability* in which a villager in rural Lebanon could just as well imagine continuing their life in Venezuela or West Africa, moving to the capital Beirut or remaining in a village. Chapter two complicates the standard thinking of push-and-pull factors in migration by taking up Bourdieu's concept of *illusio* to understand *existential mobility*, the way moving across space is always tied to the desire to advance through one's life. Existential mobility, Hage suggests, is akin to Spinoza's notion of joy: movement to a greater state of perfection, that is, towards a higher agency. Remaining in a village can make a person feel stuck, especially if options for migrating or otherwise advancing through life are not readily available. Chapter three generates another key concept by borrowing Lévi-Strauss's notion of *anisogamic marriage* (marriage between hierarchically unequal parties) and stretching it for use as part of the *comparative mode of existence*. Here, he argues that Lebanese migratory lifeworlds are saturated with comparative valorisations of the home country and the destinations of migration. These comparisons are tinged with a sense of inferiority, not (only) due to the wider

post-colonial conditions, but also due to the specific feeling of hailing from a country that could not keep hold of yourself.

Chapter four argues that, rather than torn between here and there (the country of origin and the country of migration), it would be better to understand migratory subjects as fragmented—as partly and sometimes here, partly and sometimes there. Based on this, chapter five provides the book's main theoretical contribution, proposing to understand diasporic realities as *lenticular* as in the photographic technique. Fragmented migratory subjects, according to Hage, are indeed not torn between but inhabit multiple spaces of the home country and the diasporic country. Hage bases this lenticularity on the distinction between metaphor and metonym, and suggests, through ample ethnographic examples, that objects (posters, foodstuffs, accents, and gestures) from elsewhere do not necessarily simply remind one of their origin, but could be understood as metonymic of it. A Lebanese cucumber in Australia is a piece of Lebanon in Australia in a very real way. Likewise, a villa in Mount Lebanon paid for using remittances is an extension of the countries of diaspora in Lebanon. The remaining four chapters further explain, develop, and nuance this picture, whilst using rich ethnographic material to discuss agency and community (Ch. 6), kinship and family (Ch. 7), sexuality (Ch. 8), and urban space in Beirut (Ch. 9).

The image of diasporic lifeworlds emerging from Hage's ethnographic theorisation stresses two issues: comparative valorisations as a mode of making sense of relations between locations, and the relationality of always multiple lenticular space. Thus, it seems to me that Hage's diasporic subject is always both well aware of the relative value of here and there, whilst simultaneously fragmented in an

ontological sense between that here and there. Hage explicitly suggests this in relation to recent decades' debates on the ontological turn in anthropology (eg. Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). For me, Hage's argument seems very much in line with other recent attempts to make sense of the lifeworlds of our ethnographic interlocutors, such as Ilana Gershon's (2019) emphasis on porous social orders and boundary work. The image composed by Hage is persuasive, and his treatment of lenticularity and anisogamic comparisons are likely relevant to scholars well beyond the fields of migration and diasporic studies or Middle Eastern studies. For scholars working in these fields, and even more so for those working in Lebanon or amongst the Lebanese, I would recommend this book more than warmly. Hage readily admits that the image of the Lebanese diaspora emerging from his monograph emphasises commonalities instead of differences in experience. He also admits that he deals with power only insofar as it is internal to the diasporic culture his writing conjures (that is, mostly of the patriarchal kinship type) and ignores the 'whites' of border regimes and (post)colonial global power. As for studies of Lebanese diaspora, these external issues of difference and power will thus have to be examined by other scholars. But I would agree that their bracketing has been a sound step towards emphasising the novel and unique effort of this fascinating work.

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Li, Tania Murray and Pujo Semedi. *Plantation Life: Corporate Occupation in Indonesia's Oil Palm Zone*. Durham: Duke University Press. 2021. xiii + 243 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4780-1495-9 (softcover); 978-1-4780-1399-0 (hardcover); 978-14780-2223-7 (E-book)

What are the relations formed between residents and corporations, and what forms of life does the corporate presence generate? *Plantation Life* is the outcome of several years of rigorous ethnographic fieldwork, extensive discussions, and collaborative engagement focused on these questions. In the preface, Li and Semedi share their initial perceptions of a plantation corporation, viewing it as a 'lazy giant', 'greedy and careless', or a machine controlling human lives (2021: vii). However, as the book demonstrates, the relations formed with a plantation are more complex and involve multiple actors, contrasting points of view, and silent protests.

The role of plantation corporations in shaping environments, bodies, and societal relations has been addressed through the concept of 'plantationocene' (Haraway 2015; Mitman 2019; Murphy and Schroering 2020). Viewed as an alternate name for the Anthropocene epoch, 'plantationocene' draws attention to colonialism, capitalism, and racial hierarchies from which environmental problems cannot be detached (Moore et al. 2019). Li and Semedi's book focuses on two plantations situated in the Tanjung region in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. One of them, Natco, is a state-owned corporation, while the second, Priva, is a private company, although its presence is largely enabled by the state. The research is based on two threads of analysis: Marx's political economy focusing on the

unequal profit distribution of capital production, and Foucault's political technology centring on governmentality and producing subjects. Bridging these two threads, the authors propose the term 'corporate occupation' as the volume's central concept. Li and Semedi stretch the term 'occupation', which commonly refers to a foreign military presence on a certain territory and use it to theorise the corporation's relations with residents in Tanjung. The term's usage, as the authors explain, allows them to focus on the forceful nature of the corporation's control over territory, as well as the reorganisation of rule over the land and its population. It would be interesting, however, to read in more detail why the term 'occupation' was chosen, perhaps through engagement with its definition in international law. The discussion of the profound role of 'state allies' (2021: 8) in shaping corporate occupation regimes could also be potentially expanded when theorising the concept.

The book is clearly structured and divided into five chapters, each focused on a specific research question. In the first chapter, the authors ask, 'How did the Natco and Priva plantations become established and what sets of relations did their presence generate?' As Li and Semedi discuss, corporate presence was enabled by the legal regime that granted large territories for establishing plantations. Natco's establishment was backed by coercive forces, such as the presence of government officials,

and thus did not require local assistance. Priva's establishment, on the contrary, relied on the assistance of 'land release teams' comprised of village heads, local officials, customary leaders, and the police. Although Priva's establishment may seem milder, the authors view both strategies as occupation processes, since they both resulted in land-grabbing and the deprivation of rights.

The second chapter focuses on the question, 'Who worked on the two plantations and why?' The authors raise the following question: If local workers are not physically confined to the plantations, why do they stay? Early after their establishment, both Natco and Priva relied on workers from Java or other parts of Indonesia. By 2010, many locals who lost their rubber-tapping income needed plantation work and were hired, although both companies still preferred recruiting migrant workers. Due to the oversupply of labour forces, workers had to tolerate plantation work even though many of them were not happy with the changing policies, given reduced work security and the unfair attitudes of plantation managers.

For the third chapter, the central question is 'What did it mean for farmers to be bound to a corporation?' Until 2010–2015, small-scale Dayak farmers in Tanjung had a certain degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency, retaining significant control over their land. At the same time, palm oil out-grower farmers attached to the Priva plantation suffered from their fragile status as their work depended solely on the corporation's credit schemes and material infrastructures such as roads and mills. This fragility clashed with the image of independent and modern farmers against the bright future promoted by the corporation. This chapter highlights the differences between farmers bound to a corporation and independent farmers enjoying much greater autonomy.

The fourth chapter centres on the forms of life emerging in the plantation zone. Given that the presence of corporations was backed by references to their public good, their operations were supported by land and labour laws and smoothed by government officials. In their daily processes, both corporations used references to family loyalty, care, or mutual help to secure workers' allegiance and support. However, the workers experienced their relations with employers as situated far from these family-related idioms. Corporations relied on hierarchies manifested in the organisation of space and time, workers' bodies, and the materials with which they engaged. Due to these hierarchies, the villagers viewed corporate managers not as neighbours, but as an alien force.

The final chapter weaves together the previously discussed themes and poses a question: 'Why are corporate palm oil plantations still expanding across Indonesia?' Li and Semedi demonstrate that plantation corporations receive concessions to carry out beneficial functions instead of the state assuming such activities. They are expected to bring employment, income, and prosperity to remote areas, and, therefore, a certain level of harm is seen as unavoidable. Thus, the presence of the corporations is rarely questioned, and, instead, their specific practices are addressed. With the assumption that there are 'good' and 'bad' corporations, the ultimate question about the necessity of the corporate presence is set aside. Another factor enabling the corporate presence is the dismissal of smallholder alternatives. Independent smallholders, however, could prevent the further expansion of plantations by taking control of the land and offering alternative employment options. Nevertheless, plantation corporations in Indonesia are politically favoured and protected.

The appendix, where the authors reflect on collaborative data collection and the writing process as well as on the differences in their approaches to field research, brings additional value to this book. Since the appendix clarifies to a large extent how the material was collected and analysed, it could perhaps be even more valuable for readers if placed at the very beginning of the book as part of the preface. As a reader, I felt at times that such an explanation was missing from the narrative.

The volume is richly illustrated with photos from the field, maps, and graphic images (e.g., screenshots from a company's website promoting 'sustainable palm oil' on page 170). The photos, some of them deeply symbolic (such as the cover photo with dead palm trees impending upon a passerby), enhance the clarity of the authors' argumentation and bring additional layers to the overall story.

Through an unfolding of the 'corporate occupation' concept, the volume draws attention to an array of dispersed practices employed by corporations—with the assistance of governmental bodies—to establish control over the territory and its population. This is a solid contribution to 'plantationocene' studies, which could be used as study material in graduate-level courses engaging with notions of governmentality and power distribution. The book's appendix could be especially interesting for anthropology students as an example of collaborative data collection. Due to its focus on corporations suppressing local interests and voices, the book could also certainly be used by activists as background material for awareness-raising campaigns.

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