SPECIAL ISSUE
UNCERTAINTY AND SURVIVANCE:
WHAT REMAINS AFTER THE CRISIS?

INTRODUCTION – UNCERTAINTY AND SURVIVANCE: WHAT REMAINS AFTER THE CRISIS?

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Introduction

Life is not constant, and there are moments of crisis and change when a person's sense of self can be shaken, their moral judgment clouded, and their emotions thrown into disarray. Whether it is the passing of a cherished individual, the loss of physical capabilities, a crisis of faith or financial setback, displacement from one's home or homeland, these losses often lead to a similar process of disorientation and shock (Jackson 2021). We often confront uncertainty in life events and make choices that prey on our emotions and affect our decision-making processes. Uncertainty reminds us, time and again, of the pervasive interconnectedness of life events, ecologies, and cosmologies of knowledge and action. However, is uncertainty a solid consistent concept, one that is defined, felt, and acted upon in the same manner everywhere? Anthropologist Lisa Stevenson says the kinds of uncertainty that we examine in social research makes a difference (2014: 175). For example, Stevenson classified the uncertainty of her research participants from the Inuit community in Canada into epistemological and ontological types. Uncertainty at the epistemological level, Stevenson writes, is related to 'how and whether we can know things about the future' (2014: 175). On the ontological level, it is 'having to do with the inherent undecidability about what the world is or will be' (Stevenson 2014: 175).

Furthermore, Sandra Calkins's ethnographic research among Rashaida in northeastern Sudan affirms that uncertainty is experienced differently according to different contexts and

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temporalities (2016). Calkins relates human reflexivity to the kind of uncertainty experienced by people, especially during precarious times and with unmet expectations. This is manifested in questioning the taken-for-granted forms, ideals, and rules that establish a degree of predictability to life events (2016). Although both Calkins' (2016) and Stevenson's (2014) ethnographies were conducted in specific localities, where certain communities were rendered more marginalised than others and where experienced uncertainties were also the result of acts of violence, negligence, and structural impoverishment, their research participants related differently to uncertainty and deployed acts of care and resistance to bargain with uncertainty.

Amidst the cruelty of crises and wars in different parts of the world, a recent global example of uncertainty and crisis that everyone has experienced was living through the COVID-19 pandemic, in which biomedical uncertainty and public health issues influenced social, economic, and political decision-making processes. The pandemic compelled us to confront precarious, uncertain, and unforeseeable issues. This also reminds us of a lack of control over our circumstances. Our everyday lives, as we knew them, were no longer taken for granted. Previously, spontaneous acts were transformed into a negotiation process between our inner fears and thoughts, and our external environment. I draw on the two ethnographies already mentioned and the example of COVID-19 to highlight the centrality of human agencies in negotiating uncertainty. Their ethnographies show that human agency is configured in relation to how people resist and endure unpredictable events and crises through their techniques of bargaining with uncertainty. I argue that an understanding of how people live through and in the aftermath of uncertain and catastrophic events is aided by the deployment of the analytic of 'survivance' as a conceptual category in relation to coping with crises and uncertainty.

The concept of survivance is borrowed from Critical Native American Studies. Originally, it was a legal term primarily used to denote inheritance. Gerald Vizenor, a Native scholar and prolific author, repurposed this term to articulate the notion of surviving and enduring the profound traumatic and violent events and struggles within Native American history. Vizenor's conceptualisation of survivance merges the words 'survival' and 'resistance', signified by the suffix -ance in survivance. This suffix implies a quality that goes beyond mere description of survival (Vizenor, 1998) to embrace endurance and active presence. Consequently, when witnessing human experiences and narratives of overcoming crises and navigating uncertainty, Vizenor's theorisation of Native Survivance provides an inspiration that emphasises that survivance is more than mere survival because it constitutes a form of affirmative action, celebrating and affirming survival, rather than merely enduring ongoing oppression and violence. It signifies the active presence and continuity of human stories, bridging the past, present, and future (Vizenor, 1994; 2008). I argue that by theorising the negotiating of uncertainty in connection with an analytic of survivance, we can gain insight into what endures after the loss of possibilities and the experience of catastrophic and uncertain events, whether on an individual or collective scale.

Survivance of the Precariat

This special issue proposes the notion of 'Survivance of the Precariat', acknowledging the shared but unequal experiences of precarity. Economist Guy Standing defined and popularised the term 'precariat' to refer to a diverse group of people who experience precarious and unstable living conditions characterised by economic insecurity, unstable employment, and a lack of access to traditional job benefits and social protections. Standing argues that the precariat is a global phenomenon that affects people from different countries, regardless of their geographical location (Standing 2011). During the development of this special issue, I became aware of the research on uncertainty and precarity conducted by some students in my cohort and other universities. I approached them to explore how the concept of survivance could be employed as an analytical framework to describe the ways in which they encountered people in their ethnographic research. This endeavour involved recognising the invisible connections between different ethnographic projects tackled by a network of colleagues who were addressing various aspects of daily life and their precarity. They indicated that uncertainty was embraced, navigated, and manoeuvred through various tactics.

Anthropologists Andrew Brandel and Marco Motta have argued for the centrality of concepts in anthropological analysis to interpret practices and elucidate reality (2021). Anthropological concepts are tools to help unpack the meaning underlying a wide array of practices and experiences in different localities and circumstances. Some of these concepts have been borrowed from the colonial archive or influenced by Christianity, as exemplified by concepts such as religion, reciprocity, and kinship. However, anthropologists have frequently encountered and adopted concepts during their fieldwork that have subsequently undergone transformation, elevation, and adaptation (Brandel and Motta 2021). David Zeitlyn (2023) emphasises the importance of languages used in anthropological analysis, the role of translating concepts, and the positive potential of creating incomplete anthropological accounts that create debates, question taken-for-granted concepts, and give space to others to complement it in order to gain insights about the human experience and diversify them. Zeitlyn argues for an 'anthropology that does not have the last word' in the name of theoretical supremacy (2023: 347), and to engage concepts that provoke debate and 'collective complementary accounts' rather than 'develop theories that win space and exclude others … as incorrect' (Zeitlyn 2023: 347).

Therefore, this special issue is both a call and an experiment. A call to think through interdisciplinary concepts to move beyond rigid analytical frameworks. An experiment was conducted to see how to adapt the concept of survivance, expanding its applicability and utilisation in social research at the intersection of precarity, capitalism, livelihood, and survival strategies beyond victimisation and passivity. The special issue aims to encourage the debate around our theme and to indirectly recognise the diverse and multiple perspectives around understanding uncertainty, crisis, precarity, and survivance. The articles look into ways in which people navigate different forms of annihilation and precarity in different localities and issues related to health, economy, environment, labour, media, humanitarian work, mobility, and migration, and conduct anthropological research at times of uncertainty and crisis. The issue celebrates the work done in precarious conditions during the pandemic and the ways in

which anthropologists and social researchers draw inspiration, examine their positionality, and learn from, and with, the communities they engage with.

Since the advent of the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism as modes of production, along with extractive financial practices, ruthless competition, blurred boundaries between the private and public spheres, and questions regarding individual and collective freedom, human adaptation and resilience have been theorised in relation to the verb 'to survive'. Although linguistically, 'survival' and 'survivance' are cognate, academic scholars have deployed them to refer to different states of existence. 'Survival' often conveys a life characterised by a fight-or-flight response, leading to a gradual erosion of existence. On the other hand, 'survivance' has attracted the attention of philosophers and literary scholars, who seek to theorise states of being that transcend the notion of mere survival. Survivance can be conceptualised as survival accompanied by resistance and endurance to affirm a certain presence and continuity in life (Vizenor 2008; 2009), or as a state of existence that lies between life and death, particularly concerning objects, concepts, stories, beliefs, and materials that are left behind (Derrida 2011; Saghafi 2015; Povinelli 2021). Furthermore, survivance encompasses the act of sustaining life against annihilation (Vizenor 2008), or what persists after and transcends death, allowing life to persist (Derrida 2011). Achieving this requires the deployment of tactics, beliefs, and practices that can withstand times of crisis and alleviate uncertainty. Importantly, Gerald Vizenor's literary theory of survivance rejects passive survival, instead emphasising the reclamation of agency and autonomy to establish an 'active presence' (Vizenor 2008).

The concept of 'survivance', as employed in Native American discussions, offers a broader perspective on resistance and a less victimising lens through which to view something beyond mere survival (Vizenor 1994; 2009). Functioning as a framework that opposes loss and erasure, violence, and retaliation, and instead emphasises reparation and the creation of thriving conditions, survivance extends its relevance beyond the Native American experience. It also establishes a common thread of connection and shared experiences among individuals who employ a range of strategies to endure, display resilience, demonstrate resourcefulness, and reject the terms imposed upon them by the prevailing power structures. The notion of survivance does not imply the resolution of a crisis or absolute safety. Instead, it signifies a continuous existence amid crisis, turbulence, transformation, anxiety, and loss. The semantic scope of the term survivance has expanded beyond merely describing survival; it now resonates with vitality and remembrance. In this issue, the concept is explored, interpreted, questioned, and reinterpreted across various research domains. It is crucial to emphasise that the research participants in the included articles did not universally employ the concept of survivance to articulate their ways of living as they were actively engaged in the actions of life itself. Instead, the concept of survivance serves as an analytical tool deployed by the authors to illustrate the enduring thread amidst life's uncertainties, ruptures, and profound acknowledgement of human resilience during and after calamities.

Survivance is deeply entangled with the contextual temporality of the event at stake. It represents not only survival at the present moment but also the capacity to persist and continue. It differs from, yet expands on, the concept of becoming (Biehl and Locke 2017), where the adaptability and incompleteness of people's ongoing transformations challenge and

go beyond established ways of understanding and engaging with the world in various uncertain and crisis-led contexts (Biehl and Locke 2017). In the anthropology of becoming, João Biehl employs the term 'becoming' to depict the ongoing transformative process of human existence. He argues that we are not static or bounded beings, but rather dynamic and ever-changing entities that are perpetually becoming new versions of ourselves. Biehl's concept of becoming is rooted in the work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who posited that becoming is not a linear progression of development but rather a complex and unpredictable process of change. Deleuze believed that we are constantly becoming something other than what we are and that this process of becoming is crucial to our creativity and vitality. I argue that survivance expands on the idea of becoming as it illustrates how people navigate and persist through uncertainty and the process of their 'becoming'. Furthermore, survivance amalgamates notions of survival and resistance, capturing the ways human agency and imaginative capabilities confront life's calamities and sudden changes. Moreover, the technologies of imagination that people deploy to envision alternative practices and futures that challenge taken-for-granted subjugation and docility are themselves techniques of survivance and endurance. As Biehl argues, we can better understand human experience by focusing on the ways in which people constantly transform themselves and their surroundings. I suggest that survivance emerges as a valuable analytical framework illuminating how people transcend victimhood, defeatist modes of absence, and docility.

The special issue asks: how can we identify survivance in the ordinary moments of everyday life, in everyday events, during and after crises, and within the openings for alternative ways of shaping lives or societies? We take the concept of survivance beyond its historical context of development with Native Americans, who endured historical genocide, land dispossession, colonisation, and their enduring repercussions, to apply it to other places and with other people who are also living through the uncertain, precarious, and mundane. I argue that survivance as an analytic is not limited to extreme situations marked by silence, death, and suffering. Instead, as the articles show, survivance is woven into the fabric of everyday life, where individuals seek meaning or craft their own sense of purpose amid various forms of subjugation, chronic health issues, capital manipulation, and injustice while striving to preserve hope and humanity. In such a context, this issue extends the concept of survivance and embraces the vitality that accompanies survival, offering diverse interpretations of what survivance might entail.

An analytic of survivance embraces ambiguity and carries an underlying sense of perseverance and endurance, signifying that what remains after encountering uncertainty or catastrophe involves preserving the past and adapting to the unpredictability and uncertainty encountered in daily life, thereby making the uncertainty more familiar. This special issue sought to understand the relationship between uncertainty and survivance and how they are being conceptualised, refashioned, and acted upon in different contexts and localities. The articles included aim to examine both the challenges and opportunities that manifest the techniques of bargaining with the uncertain, and the dialectics 'between contingency and agency in situations of rupture, transformation, and scarcity' (Calkins 2016: 4). The articles delineate the techniques of survival in relation to different types of uncertainty (biomedical, economic, ecological, social, and political), especially at times of transformation and crises.

Some articles question the utilisation of survivance as an analytic, while others seek to move beyond the two themes of uncertainty and survivance to provide different perspectives that theorise human adaptability to misfortune and life's calamities. The special issue calls for animated doctoral students and early career researchers and creates a space for diverse and open discussions about the theme. Most of the research that informed the included articles was conducted during a time of crisis or during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a testimony to the survival and adaptation of the authors to unexpected changes and uncertainty. The call for a special issue asked the following questions as prompts:

❖ How can we understand the techniques of surviving uncertainty in relation to survivance, a concept borrowed from critical Native American studies?
❖ How might uncertainty and/or survivance be conceptualised according to the specific localities and temporalities of ethnographic research, and towards an anthropology of uncertainty?
❖ How do people who are rendered more marginalised than others navigate uncertainty, and what are the forms, ideals, and techniques they deploy?
❖ At times of transformation, whether at the collective or individual level or both, how do people define survivance and its emblems?

Overview of the articles

As previously mentioned, this special issue aims to extend the application of Vizenor's concept of survivance beyond the context of indigenous or Native American experiences to encompass the precariat and the uncertain, transcending the indigenous perspective. and opening the space to use the concept of survivance to think through the techniques of living through and in, surviving the uncertain, the shocks of life, and the anxious present, in pursuit of an immediate future.

The special issue contains thirteen articles. In these, we find different forms of survivance revealing different tactics that enclose both rational and emotional, affective and imaginary, and tangible and intangible ways of dealing with the ambiguity and uncertainty of life events. Naomi Marshall delves into the appropriateness of applying Vizenor's concept of 'survivance' beyond its Native American contexts. Specifically, she asks whether 'survivance' serves as a suitable analytical tool for comprehending the actions and perspectives of individuals dealing with an unpredictable genetic condition in England and Wales. While individuals in these contexts may employ irony and creativity to resist misrepresentation and stigma, she argues that the utilisation of 'survivance' as a critical term needs to be contextualised and adapted. Marshall also reflects on the broader role and adaptability of theory within the field of anthropology.

Alexia Liakounakou examines the impact of various crises confronting Greek society, shedding light on how these crises are driving individuals to adopt a heightened focus on their own bodies, resorting to cosmetic surgery to maintain a sense of active agency. Liakounakou explains that the crises create a form of personal and existential hyper-awareness, leading her

participants to become acutely conscious of how their bodies, marked by conditions such as depression, anxiety, aging, and other signs of 'decay', as they believe that the human body is one aspect of life that they can directly control. Liakounakou characterises the bodies as 'bodies-in-crisis', serving as a tangible landscape where affective negotiations for agency, transformation, and survivance unfold. Drawing from the concept of survivance, Liakounakou incorporates insights from feminist and post-feminist studies on gender and cosmetic surgery.

Molly Acheson considers the everyday challenges of raising a child with disabilities and investigates the cultural ramifications of disability and the pervasive uncertainty associated with parenting a child with disabilities. Acheson regards disability as a construct that is influenced by culture. She explores the role of the relationship with state services in shaping parents' ability to envision a hopeful and planned future for their child. Furthermore, Acheson scrutinises how parents navigate, survive, and cope with the uncertainties of examining the various expressions of confusion and apprehension resulting from deficiencies in state services, and argues that austerity measures have a disabling impact.

Wesam Hassan examines practices of games of chance in Istanbul during times of multiple crisis (economic, political, and a pandemic). Instead of solely focusing on the clinical and moral judgments typically linked with gambling, Hassan elucidates how the utilisation of games of chance paradoxically functions as a mechanism for renewing their hopes amidst prevailing uncertain social, economic, and political circumstances. Hassan proposes a conceptual framework that characterises their imaginative strategies for envisioning a more favourable future, which can be viewed as acts of survivance that defy the looming threat of annihilation and contribute to the revitalisation of their presence, enabling them to endure pervasive instability, precarity, and anxiety concerning the future.

Mariz Kelada analyses the labour dynamics involved in on-location filming in Cairo and challenges conventional dichotomies such as formal versus informal labour and exploitation versus resistance. Kelada focuses on communal interdependencies that are concurrently proliferating to provide the necessary economic support for the media industry. Kelada puts forward the concept of 'vitalist pragmatics' as a potentially versatile and comprehensive framework to encapsulate the notion of survivance to show the potential for comprehending the strategies and mechanisms employed by precarious labourers.

Freya Hope's article explains how the New Travelers, who emerged in the UK since the 1970s, employ various strategies to invest in and secure certainty about their shared future. Hope's interlocutors embark on a journey of 'alternative world making' and challenge the argument that gypsies, travellers, and other marginalised groups only have a strong focus on the present moment. As one of Hope's interlocutors says, 'There will always be Travellers', despite the enactment of new legislation criminalising their lifestyle at that time. Hope's article conceptualises New Travellers, who originated in opposition to capitalism, individualisation, and environmental degradation, as creators of a new alternative world, and explores the reasons behind their unwavering certainty that they will endure, even in the face of legal challenges.

Sanne Rotmeijer unpacks the concept of survivance and its contextualisation within the localities and temporalities of Curaçao, a Dutch Caribbean island, as observed through the lens of everyday news routines. Rotmeijer places particular emphasis on future

'orientations', which are fluid and open-ended (Bryant and Knight 2019). Rotmeijer examines how Curaçaoans respond to pervasive uncertainty through future-focused news routines. Curaçaoans engage with news practices as a means of anticipating a brighter future through activities such as participation in lottery games and faith in an inevitable future, as indicated by obituaries. Rotmeijer argues that everyday news practices related to the lottery (which symbolises life's uncertainties) demonstrate how Curaçaoans, particularly those on the margins without access to institutional public platforms, ingeniously navigate uncertainty by embracing chance, which is considered a strategy of survivance, wherein an active presence materialises within the realm of everyday life's contingencies.

Julio Rodriguez Stimson investigates the various interconnected risks faced by Galapagueño farmers in the Galapagos Islands. Rodriguez Stimson illustrates the effects of portraying the Galapagos Islands as an 'evolutionary laboratory' and the last remaining paradise on Earth on the farmers and on the archipelago. The sense of attachment to the island is threatened by various interconnected risks such as pest infestations, climate change, and the challenges posed by COVID-19 (Rodriguez Stimson's research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic). These challenges have exacerbated preexisting difficulties in the agricultural sector, giving rise to what he coins as the 'coexistential rift.' Rodriguez Stimson argues that strengthening the agricultural sector and fostering a sense of belonging could potentially address the rift and both social and environmental challenges in the Galapagos.

Akira Shah discusses the uncertainties brought about by COVID-19 and how they have served as a poignant reminder to ethnographers of the dual nature of improvisation in ethnographic research. Shah delves into the broader question of when it becomes necessary to relinquish improvisational practices in favour of preserving a researcher's emotional well-being and survivance in the field. Shah argues that improvisation is an inherent and essential element of ethnographic research, while on the other hand, it imposes limitations on the process. Shah reflects on his own experience as an ethnographer and how the pandemic has given rise to a significant increase in digital ethnographic research characterised by its highly improvised nature. Shah contemplates the nuances of success and failure in improvisational approaches during the pandemic and how to survive the uncertainties of conducting fieldwork amidst global pandemics.

Peyton Cherry examines the theme of 'gender issues' (referred to as *gendaa mondai*), which witnessed a significant increase in grassroots activism in Japan in the wake of the #MeToo Movement in 2017. Cherry focuses on activist groups such as Voice Up Japan, Chabudai Gaeshi Joshi Action, and student-led initiatives on sexual consent at universities such as Waseda, which are dedicated to addressing the issue of sexual violence not only within academic institutions but also in the broader society. Cherry demonstrates that involvement in smaller-scale community initiatives, rather than traditional forms of protest activism, is influenced by both institutional and individual narratives. The transmission of these narratives is vital for young individuals to practice 'survivance' and discover a sense of belonging within different social groups. Cherry argues that 'voicing up' in Tokyo is characterised less by overtly vocal and proud declarations or 'post-closet discourses', as described by scholars. Instead, it is shaped by localised dialogues that adapt to trending terminology and serve as an initial awareness-raising effort.

Gilda Borriello examines refugee entrepreneurship and focuses on the concept of uncertainty as a fundamental element that they face. Borriello challenges the conventional notion of entrepreneurship characterised by rationality and stability and sheds light on how refugees venture into entrepreneurship under conditions of pronounced uncertainty and adversity, stemming not only from their displacement experiences but also exacerbated by the sudden onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Borriello explains that refugees often embark on entrepreneurial endeavours out of sheer necessity and that they exhibit remarkable tenacity, resilience, and an aptitude for not only achieving success but also expanding their ventures. Borriello argues that refugees are establishing their businesses as the sole element of certainty in their lives by leveraging existing social connections or creating new ones to counteract institutional constraints and surmount adversity.

Gabrielle Masi explores the concepts of uncertainty and risk within the context of a specific aspect of human mobility: the experiences of unsuccessful return migrations from the Central Mediterranean route in Sub-Saharan Africa. Masi draws on ethnographic research conducted in Velingara, Senegal, where returnee migrants who come back empty-handed face a moment of crisis, compelling them to reassess their life trajectories. Masi explains that the returnees interpret their homecomings through the lens of locally rooted historical concepts such as shame, honour, and independence, and they engage in this process to avoid social stigma and to reevaluate the significance of their experiences. Masi examines the role of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)-Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) program that works with returnees, transforming them into capable entrepreneurs who can analyse their present circumstances and future plans in terms of risk management and economic competitiveness. Masi argues that aid programs emerge as forms of governmentality aimed at addressing 'irregular migration' by shaping new neoliberal subjectivities within the economic and social marginalisation experienced by return migrants.

Chloe Wong-Mersereau writes about the impact of deploying the term 'crisis' that is frequently used to characterise the present social, political, and economic landscape. Wong-Mersereau argues that there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the concept's temporal dimensions and adopts an affective scholarship approach to address these conceptual gaps regarding crisis and temporality. Wong-Mersereau explores the construction of the crisis-imaginary, focusing on the language, affects, and images that contribute to its formation by analysing the crisis-imaginary, and examining the activities of the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) and the crisis-imaginary in its crisis-response efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Wong-Mersereau argues that the disjunction between the narratives presented by the crisis-imaginary and the affective experience of crisis generates a haunting effect, and that the crisis-imaginary, as an apparatus, gives rise to specific subjectivities and temporal orientations that overshadow the lived experiences of individuals working in crisis contexts. This special issue aspires to move beyond the binaries of crisis, stability, subjugation, and resistance to acknowledge and re-evaluate the ways in which humans make life liveable and possible. As evidenced by the articles featured in this special issue, the remarkable aspect of survivance that warrants attention here is its dual responsibility: it acknowledges both the lasting harm and anxiety inflicted upon people's lives from crises and unprecedented changes,

unpredictable events, and violence, and its determination not to depict these lives solely as reactions to uncertainty, violence, and crisis.

Acknowledgments

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CONTEXT MATTERS:
UTILISING VIZENOR'S THEORY OF NATIVE SURVIVANCE TO EXPLAIN EXPERIENCES OF GENETIC DIFFERENCE IN ENGLAND AND WALES

NAOMI MARSHALL[1]

This article explores the appropriateness of utilising Vizenor's writings on 'survivance' outside of Native American contexts. I ask whether survivance is a fitting analytic tool for understanding the actions and perspectives of my participants who live with an unpredictable genetic condition. While residents of England and Wales – both my own participants and those involved in other ethnographic projects – may utilise irony and creativity to resist both misrepresentation and stigma, I contend that the use of survivance as a critical term must be qualified and translated. In this article, I consider differences between the context in which Vizenor writes and the experiences of my own participants. Namely, I attend to the contrast wherein Native Americans have been understood as 'the celebrated survivor[s] of cultural genocide' (Vizenor 2008), while my participants are at times discouraged from reproducing people like themselves because of their genetic difference. The purpose of this consideration is threefold. First, I wish to find new ways of analysing the creativity of my participants. Does survivance help elucidate the agency and wisdom of my participants with NF1 in the United Kingdom? Second, I intend to add to Vizenor's discourse. What might survivance look like in a biosocial community as opposed to a cultural group? Can we understand 'survivance' as an expression of 'biopower'? How do we fully divorce survivance from survival in contexts of reproductive surveillance? Thirdly, and ultimately, the purpose of this article is to consider, more broadly, the role and flexibility of theory in anthropology.

Keywords: neurofibromatosis, survivance, biopolitics, ethnography, positionality

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Introduction

This paper considers whether Vizenor's writings on survivance can be applied out of their original context. Can ideas which were developed in and for Native American cases be faithfully and effectively utilised in the academic analysis of non-Native subjects? To fully answer this question requires a comprehensive exploration of the role and flexibility of theory in the social sciences. I cannot offer a resolution on this matter in one article. I do, however, hope to provide reflections on the translation of theory as a part of a discipline which has often grappled with the viability and value of the translation of cultures. Should I, as a sociocultural anthropologist, make use of Vizenor's conceptual work in my analysis of the experiences of my participants in England and Wales? Would such usage be ethical? Would it be productive? These are my central questions for this investigation. In the first half of this article, I consider how survivance relates to my participants' experiences of biomedical uncertainty and genetic stigma. I scope various ways in which my participants' lives and philosophies might be characterised as survivance. Then, in the second half of the paper, I begin questioning whether – in future outputs – I *should* utilise survivance as an analytic tool. I consider why a blunt co-option of Vizenor's analytic might be problematic, and offer exposition on crucial contextual differences, both present and historic, between my participants' and Vizenor's subjects. This paper's conclusion centres on questioning the adaptability and applicability of regionally specific anthropological theorisation more broadly. But before I begin this investigation, I first wish to offer some background on Vizenor's concept of survivance. After all, as this paper intends to demonstrate, context matters.

Vizenor's 'survivance' is difficult to define in a succinct manner. Vizenor asserts that 'theories of survivance' are 'imprecise by definition' (2008: 1). However, for the purpose of clarity in this article, I will work with the following definition. At its core, Vizenor's survivance refers to the active ways in which Indigenous peoples inherit the past, and by doing so nullify lazy and inaccurate characterisation of such peoples as mere victims. Lockard summarises survivance as 'the arch-opponent of victimization' (2008: 210). That being said, Lockard also uses the following quote from Sonya Atalay to emphasise that survivance does not downplay the seriousness of attacks made on Indigenous ways of life: 'the concept of survivance is not about avoiding or minimizing the horrors and tragedy of colonization. It includes agency and Native presence but does not refuse stories of struggle' (2008: 209). Vizenor claims 'survivance' is not a 'theory' (2008: 11), but an action. He writes, it is 'the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb survive, 'to remain alive or in existence,' to outlive, persevered with a suffix of survivancy' (2008: 19). King, Gubele, and Anderson summarise the term survivance as Vizernor's 'vision of Indigenous nations'. They continue, 'survivance is survival and resistance together: surviving the documented, centuries-long genocide of American Indian peoples and resisting still the narratives and policies that seek to marginalize and – yes, still now – assimilate indigenous peoples.' (King, Gubele, Anderson 2015: 7)

Vizenor intended for his work to be utilised broadly in Indigenous-American studies but came to write about survivance from a more specific regional focus. An esteemed professor of American and Literature studies, Gerald Robert Vizenor is an Anishinaabe scholar

and enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. He first discusses 'survivance' in his 1993 book, *The ruins of representation,* but his interest in a better analytic vocabulary for Native experiences can be traced back to his time as a graduate student (Vizenor 2008: 1-19). Against advice from his master's supervisor, Vizenor chose to conduct archival work on *The Progress,* a historic newspaper with which Vizenor had a personal connection. First published in 1886 on the White Earth Reservation, *The Progress* was an English language newspaper which reported political issues of relevance to those who lived on the reservation (Vizenor 1965). One of the editors of the paper was one of Vizenor's ancestors. This editor opposed the federal allotment of reservation land and utilised mockery and political commentary in *The Progress* to express his discontent (Vizenor 2008: 10-11). One can understand Vizenor's development of the term 'survivance' as a means to describe the actions of people, such as this editor, who creatively refused to abide by the logic of settler colonialism.

Vizenor's writings on 'survivance' have been seminal. To give but one example of the flexibility and advantage of survivance as an analytic tool, consider Henry's (2021) work among Indigenous gangs in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Whereas a settler imaginary has 'pathologized understandings of Indigenous lifeworlds, especially within street spaces' (Henry 2021), survivance offers an alternative understanding. By framing street activity as survivance, Henry argues that his participants should be respected as providers for their families, rather than misjudged as delinquents. Moreover, Henry locates these young men among other Indigenous peoples who 'have found and continue to find innovative ways to survive, resist, and resurge themselves within settler spaces.' Survivance evidently has important analytic potential, even beyond Vizenor's Anishinaabe regional focus. But how might survivance work outside of Native American contexts altogether? What is its potential for other discourse?

NF1 and survivance

I was introduced to Vizenor's writings on survivance by a colleague, Wesam Hassan. During the past few years, Hassan and I have discussed the palpable 'uncertainty' present in the everyday lives of our participants, a comparison we invite despite evident contrasts between our field sites. Hassan's work explores attitudes towards – and experiences of – games of chance in Istanbul. In my work, I focus on people's experiences of an uncertain genetic condition in England and Wales. From the outset, I could see that survivance was relevant to my research. The people I work with are – much like people in the context of Vizenor's writings – too often eschewed as tragic victims rather than perceived as powerful agents. Yet unlike the people for whom Vizenor writes, who live in the continuing spectre of cultural genocide, my participants persist against genetic stigmatisation.

My participants have, or have an immediate relative with, neurofibromatosis type 1 (NF1). Although the cause of this genetic condition is limited to a change in one gene, neurofibromatosis manifests as a 'multi-system disorder' (Ratner and Miller 2015). Symptoms of NF1 include, but are not limited to, progressive disfigurement and disability from benign tumour growth throughout the nervous system, skin pigmentation abnormalities, congenital cognitive differences, bone deformities, and rarer complications – such as NF1-associated

cancers (Carrieri, Farrimond, Kelly and Turnpenny 2016). As well as being highly varied in presentation, NF1 symptoms are also highly unpredictable. Symptoms can appear, or worsen, without warning at any point in the affected person's life (Ratner and Miller 2015; Carrieri, Farrimond, Kelly and Turnpenny 2016). As one of my participants reflected, people with NF1 live with 'certain uncertainties'. That is, whilst there is a long list of NF1 symptoms which certainly *might* happen, there is always uncertainty over when or whether they *will* happen. The idiosyncrasy and unpredictability of each NF1 case means patients cannot know when they are fully symptomatic according to Konrad's 'post-diagnosis, pre-symptomatic' categorisations (Konrad 2005: 14). Instead, people with NF1 have a liminal diagnosis which troubles how they define themselves and the extent of their illness. In summation, my participants live with a potentially serious genetic condition.

From the summer of 2020 to the spring of 2022, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork with a London-based NF1 charity. This organisation, which I will call Neurofibromatosis Communal (NFC), works to serve the interests of people with nerve tumour causing conditions such as NF1 and NF2-related schwannomatosis. During this fieldwork period, I spent considerable time observing this biosocial[2] group's successful enactment of biopower. That is, I attended to how my participants acquired specialised medical knowledge to better navigate the nationalised health service in the United Kingdom, and to receive appropriate support from their employers and the government. Accordingly, while people with NF1 are geographically isolated from each other, my participants still enjoyed a certain degree of imagined community with other people with NF1 in the UK. NFC certainly helps foster this community.

My methodology consisted of a mixture of semi-structured online interviews and in-person participant observation. Although upwards of 56 participants took part in my research, I would characterise my project as focusing on the lives and philosophies of seven key participants, all of whom I came to know well over several regular meetings. One of these key participants – William – is of particular relevance to this investigation into the applicability of survivance out of its original context. While I hypothesise that all my participants enact survivance to a certain extent, William's wit, direct manner of speaking, and loud and proud demeanour make him an obvious case study for this article. By introducing William's experiences and outlook, my intent is twofold. First, I wish to treat this as a heuristic exercise to help me better unpack the nuances of my participants' actions and experiences. Secondly, and of foremost relevance to this paper's focus, my aim is to consider how Vizenor's conceptualisation of survivance might be applied out of context.

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[2]As a point of interest, Paul Rabinow referenced neurofibromatosis groups when he first theorised 'biosociality'. He wrote, 'There already are, for example, neurofibromatosis groups whose members meet to share their experiences, lobby for their disease, educate their children, redo their home environment and so on. That is what I mean by biosociality … Such groups will have medical specialists, laboratories, narratives, traditions, and a heavy panoply of pastoral keepers to help them experience, share, intervene, and "understand" their fate.' (Rabinow 1996: 102)

William's practice of survivance

William is a retired nurse in his seventies living in Bristol. His politics, language, and energy seem more in line with a young student than with what some might expect from an upper-middle-class, southern English man raised in the 1950s. Passionate about transgender rights, young adult literature, and the right-to-die movement, William is kind, foul-mouthed, and – as I increasingly appreciated over the course of my research – exceptionally wise. William's diagnosis of NF1 seems the least interesting facet about him, although it is perhaps the first thing you will notice upon meeting him. William has numerous benign neurofibroma tumours on his face and neck. He is more than aware of stolen glances from strangers. He is far fonder of outright questions posed by young children who are open and – in his opinion – innocent in their curiosity about his visible difference. 'Why do you have bumpy skin?' and 'what do your lumps feel like?' are inquisitions frequently fielded by William. In one of our earlier meetings, he joked to me, 'how do you explain clinical genetics to a four-year-old?' It struck me that William was, in fact, more than adept at explaining his neurofibromatosis to children and adults alike. 'I was born different', he explains to young children. To slightly older children, he might describe genetics by referencing eye colour: 'we all have recipes that make us, *us*. Your recipe gives you green eyes, and my recipe gives me these spots on my skin. That's why you can't catch my lumps, they're unique to me.' One could attribute William's communication skills to his decades as a paediatric nurse on neurology ward. A substantial portion of his job was explaining complex conditions to scared parents and too-often-belittled children. However, my inference is that it is not simply his career which enabled such clear explanations about his NF1. William's introspection, candour, and humour are all his own.

William is different to many of my other participants in the degree to which he is willing to openly analyse, and at times criticise, NFC – the NF1 charity with whom I worked. William has quite the reputation for writing passionate letters to NFC. He dislikes how the charity champions the voices of parents of patients; he feels this comes at the expense of offering space for people with NF1 to speak about and for themselves. Furthermore, he takes particular issue with the portrayal of people with NF1 as objects of pity. He explained to me that he understands why NFC paints people with NF1 this way in their social media posts. These depictions evidently increase fundraising revenue. After all, he speculates, what better way to motivate generosity than by playing up the sad struggle of a sweet young child with NF1 complications? The problem is, in William's mind, that this implicitly paints all people with NF1 as pitiable. According to William, such a picture is not only inaccurate but also unhelpful.

William attests that people with NF1 should not be portrayed as, or made to feel, 'in-valid' – a phrase he has deliberately reappropriated from the outdated term 'invalid'. William argues that 'the problem' is with society, not with people with NF1. He elaborates that his experiences of exclusion should not be attributed to *his* difference, but *society's* inability to accommodate such differences. Similarly, when I asked William if he identified as 'disabled', he explained that he does not, because it is society which has 'not-abled' him to participate. Consider the following writing excerpt by William, which he sent to me after one of our calls to synthesise much of what we had covered in the interview:

> NF1 is not something I 'have', it is part of who I am. It's not all of who I am, but it's an intrinsic part of me and I would not be the 'me' that I am without the NF1. How can I then deny it and wish it away? It is not me that creates a problem. It's a culture that looks at me and finds something lacking or something unacceptable. A culture that imposes on me the perception that I would be a better, more whole person if NF1 was not part of my make up. A culture that tells me I can never be good enough.

William's challenging of the victim slot, and the articulation that he is not being accepted on his own terms, has evident relevance to Vizenor's writings. The 'difference' of Vizenor's subjects can be located in their indigeneity, while William's difference is in his genome, yet both insist their 'differences' are relative to imposed ethnocentric norms and biases. William is not responding to a 'settler mindset', but he is nevertheless resisting the norms of British culture – where some claim eugenics still has a function in modern discourse (Rose 2001: 3). Although people may posit that negative eugenics no longer exists legally in Euro-America, one cannot deny societal preferences wherein some people are encouraged to reproduce over others (Lewis 2019: 5).

Vizenor's writing on survivance calls attention to the past, present, and – perhaps most pressingly – the future. This analytic focus also resonates with William's experience. Consider the following dialogue from William in our second meeting, wherein he recounts his difficult relationship with his mother. In his reflection, he discusses not only his challenging childhood but also the stolen future – insofar as he was encouraged not to have children lest they be like himself:

> I was the messenger of bad news to my mum, [because once I was diagnosed with NF1, she and my older sister were also diagnosed with NF1.] I wasn't and never could be good enough [for her] because I have this condition. My mother would have wished [I did not have NF1], which is understandable, and even more understandable, I think, in the context of the 1950s – how disability and things like that, things like having conditions like NF1, was seen then. I think the way she viewed me has to be viewed within the context of societal attitudes of the time. Nevertheless, it still affected me profoundly.

> The other phrase I come up with is this: I think I was 'damaged goods' [to my mum]. I was damaged goods in her mind because she herself was damaged goods [because she also had NF1]. I think if she could have put me in a parcel, sent me back to [the] Amazon [warehouse], and ask to be replaced with a better child [she would]! I laugh but it's something that's stuck with me. [There was] something in her attitude. I can understand her feelings, but I find it difficult to reconcile her actions, her repeatedly telling me throughout my childhood and adolescence that 'you must never have children'. Because I internalised that…

> I think the internalisation comes from an actual belief that, 'she's right, that I must never have children.' It wasn't until I was an adult that I questioned [the idea that I should not have children], but by that point it was already internalised. Like I said, I could rationalise my way out of it, but there was still

that inner feeling somewhere. Mum said, 'if I had known I had NF, I would have never had children myself', which is tantamount to saying, 'you shouldn't exist'. I felt there was a lack of acceptance of me as I was.

William is arguably here still trapped in a situation of survival rather than survivance. He faces not only a complex chronic medical condition, but also the need to justify his existence and the existence of future of people like himself. By contrast, Vizenor defines survivance as the projection of Native culture into an unknown yet promising future. Kroeber summarises survivance's relationship with temporality as follows: survivance concerns not only 'recalling a cherished past but also carrying the promise of a vital future (necessarily still unimagined and surprising)' (2008: 30-31). My participant William does not exemplify Vizenor's writing here. However, by attending to *why* William is unable to exemplify this facet of survivance, I am able to unpack the nuances of William's marginalisation – including his denied reproductive future – better than other theorisations I had previously considered in my analysis.

Previously in my work, I have drawn on Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma. Joan Ablon, an anthropologist who worked with North Americans with NF1 in the 1990s, also used this to account for the exclusions and obstacles faced by her participants. Goffman writes:

> Society establishes the means of categorizing persons and [the complementing set] of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories… While the stranger is present before us, evidence can arise of his possessing an attribute that makes him different from others… and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak. He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted and discounted one. Such an attribute is stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive: sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. (Goffman 1963: 2-3 quoted in Ablon 2012: 674).

Goffman's theorisation has good descriptive value insofar as he accounted for – decades before our current discourse on intersectionality and allyship – the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion. However, his writings do not centre on creative resistance to stigma. What is more, he does not discuss very much how stigma might vary in different cultural contexts.

Ablon (1999) says her intended audience consists of psychologists and other clinical professionals – who exist within a specific biomedical understanding of the world – rather than anthropologists. Contrasting Goffman and Ablon's use of stigma with Vizenor's survivance, and we can see that the latter gives a more precise explanation of William's exclusion. In a natalist society structured around ideas of the nuclear family, being discouraged from reproducing people like yourself is a critical judgement. Whereas Vizenor's ideal for survivance involves imagining a future where marginalised people 'stop defining, and even celebrating, themselves as survivors' (Kroeber 2008: 30), William is as of yet unable to escape this self-perception as someone whose likeness should not survive into the future via descendants. Vizenor's work on survivance thus adds nuance to William's experiences of stigma by identifying William as a *survivor* of prejudice not yet able to fully embody *survivance* because of continued, oftentimes internalised eugenic logic.

In seeking to examine the difficulties faced by my own participants, I have drawn on the conceptual work of philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists specialising in geographic regions other than my own. In addition to Goffman's writings on stigma which he developed in the United States, I have drawn on comparisons with Melanesian cultures, South American literature on genetic identity, and theorisation based on fieldwork in Senegal. Can I not simply add survivance into the mix? This analytic has evident benefits. Why then do I feel unease? Why does it feel wrong to compare the ingenuity of Native American populations to the experiences of my largely white, middle-class, British participants. Should I ask permission from Vizenor? Surely utilising theory in novel contexts is the modus operandi of anthropology?

The significance of contextual differences

There are obvious differences between my participants' experiences and the historical context for which Vizenor developed the analytic tool of survivance. The purpose of this next section is to further define these differences and consider their significance, with the eventual aim of evaluating the appropriateness of utilising survivance outside of Native American contexts. I hold that it is important to appreciate not only the historic annihilation of Indigenous peoples and their ways of life, but also the history of anthropology's treatment of such peoples. Vizenor is writing against what has been called 'salvage ethnography'. In 19th and 20th century anthropological practice, academics of Amerindian studies sought to study Indigenous peoples to preserve cultures which they believed were becoming less authentic and thus erased (Arnedo-Gómez 2023). In salvage ethnography, contemporary people were reductively understood as curious relics of the past, a supposedly more pure and more authentic version of human existence.

Vizenor can be understood to be directly countering this anthropological practice by discussing the famous experiences of Ishi as 'a native of survivance' rather than just the 'celebrated survivor of cultural genocide' (Vizenor 2008: 4-5, 8). Vizenor's use of the word 'celebrated' is of interest to me, along with what motivated the practice of salvage ethnography in the first place. Whilst histories show us that Native American peoples and cultures are certainly not always celebrated, salvage ethnography speaks to a more recent – and perhaps equally problematic desire – to encourage the continuation of Native Americans 'as they were'. In contrast, my participants are not always encouraged to reproduce people like themselves. Put another way, my participants are oftentimes not perceived to be objects worthy of preservation. They exist against a preference for 'people like them' to *not* survive into the future.

I hold that there are two important reasons for this diverging treatment. The first is that my participants and Vizenor's face differing forms of discrimination. Whereas the basis of discrimination towards people with NF1 is their supposedly abnormal genome, Native American peoples have faced and continue to face discrimination based on their 'indigeneity' vis-à-vis racist hierarchies. Whilst both 'genetic health' and 'race' are sociobiological constructs – constructs which have historically been weaponised to reinforce the legitimacy of the other – they are not equivalent. Indigeneity has been understood as a form of radical alterity,

whereas genetic difference – or 'disease' – is conceived of as a risk which is inherent in every population (Rabinow 1996; Rose 2007). Moreover, Indigenous identity pertains not simply to ethnogenetic identity,[3] but also to culture and history, among other facets. The second reason for the differing conceptual treatment for my participants and those of Vizenor's concerns their respective relationships to the state. Indigenous peoples existed before and apart from nation states of the Americas. In contrast, patient advocacy groups in the United Kingdom often work in tandem with the government. Consider that the term 'native' can be an appropriate descriptor of both my participants and Vizenor's, but that the meaning of this term differs radically in each context. Biosocial communities can be understood as being *native* to the neoliberal state because they are formed within it. Moreover, groups such as NFC are made necessary by the complex bureaucracy of nationalised healthcare systems. In contrast, Indigenous peoples were originally *external* to the modern states, or else forcibly incorporated into them.

These differences – in how people relate to the state, as well as in the faulted logics which underpin discrimination – not only explain differing reproductive surveillance – as already mentioned – they also call for specialised theoretical approaches. While biopolitical frameworks of analysis have called attention to the impactful enactment of biopower by people such as William, such Foucauldian frameworks would be insufficient in Indigenous contexts. To understand Indigenous experiences, it is necessary to attend to the systemic violence and structural inequality they face. As such, a political economy approach appears more apt. Although it is tempting to see survivance as a bridge between discourses in biopolitics and political economy, to do so in the abstract would be clumsy. My recommendation for theoretical progress on the matter is to call for greater contextual precision. If we want to reconcile the diverging models of biopolitics and political economy – which holds the potential for substantial theoretical innovation – then what is necessary is a specific ethnographic comparison. What is needed is a comparative project between a biosocial 'Western' self-help group and a Native American self-help group dealing with trauma, or with another medicalised issue brought about by their history of colonial oppression. Within such a project, it would be necessary to reconfigure Native American experience from only 'indigenous' to also 'biosocial'. Only then would it be possible to compare these otherwise disparate cases. For the purposes of this investigation – into the use of survivance out of context – I cannot claim that survivance is an example of biopower. The contexts in which these theoretical tools were developed are simply too dissimilar. This leaves me to consider whether I can still claim, conversely, that my participants are practising survivance, albeit in their own context. This brings me on to further points of divergence.

Another incongruence between Vizenor's context and my own ethnographic fieldwork concerns the nature of the object which is surviving. Joe Lockard writes, 'The concept of survivance – survival through resistance – entails defining what it is that has been survived' (2008: 209). Whereas survivance has been defined as the perpetuation of 'native consciousness' (Lockard 2008: 209), my participants identify themselves with others based on

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[3] Gibbon, Santos, and Sans' (2011) publication, *Racial identities, genetic ancestry, and health in South America,* includes various nuanced discussions of situations where Native American identity is associated with specific genetic markers.

their shared genetic condition. This distinction begs the question - does survivance concern the continuation of a people or a culture?[4] Is it even helpful to make this separation in the context of Native American studies? An important clarification I should make regarding my own context is that my participants do not have a unique 'culture' unto themselves. Whilst there are certainly cultures formed around disabilities – see for instance Deaf communities (Sayers and Moore 2013) – my participants were geographically separated and of vastly different backgrounds. I thus find myself confused as to what survivance might look like in a community united around a genetic – not cultural – identity.

When I spoke to William about my interest in writing this article, he pointed out that the word 'inheritance' means something quite distinctive to him. For William, when he hears the word 'inheritance', he thinks about how he has inherited his NF1 gene from his mother, and how he was denied the possibility of passing-on his heritable condition. Can a genetic variation on the NF1 gene be 'actively inherited' in the same way a cultural symbol can?[5] Even if I could construct a convincing argument on the matter, the inheritance of genetic material and genetic difference was certainly not what Vizenor was discussing in his writings on survivance. Vizenor's survivance can be understood as the active process whereby Indigenous peoples pass on 'symbols, ideas, identities, and cultural forms from one generation to another' (Henry 2021). While my participants can be seen as passing on values and identities as well as genetic difference to their offspring, these facets are not 'native' in the same way. To unpack the consequences of the distinction between Indigenous and non-indigenous symbols, and to begin my weighing of the benefits and drawbacks of using survivance out of context, I return to my participant William.

William has a great sense of humour. One need only look to the joke he made in the earlier excerpt – that is, saying that his mother would wish to 'return' him in an Amazon box – to appreciate William's dark humour. William is moreover quite the expert at mocking certain tropes. He once quipped to me that 'you don't have to climb Mount Everest to be a good person with NF1', to poke fun at the sponsored hikes on the NFC website. However, despite these creative inversions, one must appreciate that William's actions and worldview is European. Consider the following observations made by King, Gubele, and Anderson:

> In terms of indigenous rhetorics, survivance can mean many things. It can refer to the survival and perpetuation of indigenous communities' own rhetorical practices, it can refer to indigenous individuals' and communities' use of Euro-American rhetorical practices… It is the recognition of how, when, and why indigenous peoples communicate, persuade, and make knowledge both historical and now. Teaching survivance is therefore an act of recognition: acknowledging the ongoing presences and work of indigenous peoples, particularly the way indigenous communities negotiate language and rhetoric. [In order to even begin appreciating] indigenous rhetorics and what can be

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[4] Or should 'survivance' be understood as a reference to something more abstract? It is interesting to note that the term 'survivance' originated in French legal theory in the 18th century and was later utilised by Derrida to discuss how goods can be created with the express intent of outliving their creator (Henry 2021).

[5] I hold that it is dangerous to compound culture and genetics – although one could posit that reproductive partners are chosen on a social basis, and as such people's genetic makeup is a sociocultural product.

learned from them, students must understand American Indian rhetorical practices as survivance. (King, Gubele, Anderson 2015: 7-8)

William does not and cannot use 'rhetorical turns [to] reorient the framework' from Euro-American to Indigenous perspectives (King, Gubele, Anderson 2015: 7-8). Neither he nor I have sufficient knowledge of such practices to do so. Whilst William uses his humour to satirise norms which condemn him as – in his words – 'damaged goods', this humour is not a part of an Indigenous resistance. As such, although survivance has helped me better understand William's situation, I would be wary of utilising 'survivance' as an easy description of his actions without extensive qualification and contextualisation.

In review, survivance can help unpack why my participants' experiences of stigma are so devastating. By attending to Vizenor's writings, I have come to better recognise the fact that my participants are still fighting for the right for people 'like themselves' to exist in the world. Moreover, by applying survivance out of context, I have called attention to the specifics of what is actively inherited in practices of survivance. This invites further discussion about what exactly constitutes cultural, as opposed to genetic, inheritance. However, despite these two productive advances, I conclude that survivance is not an easy concept to use out of context. Survivance is specific to the skills, expertise, and creativity of people who persist against unique hardships where they are simultaneously romanticised and erased. To conclude this article, I wish to make some wider reflections on the translation of theory in anthropology, before considering how we might borrow from ideas of survivance without bluntly appropriating the term.

Conclusions

'[Anthropological] ideas are as useful in making sense of an Amazon warehouse as in an Amazon jungle'. – Gillian Tett, 2021

'Is there not a danger in assuming simply from introspection that very different people to ourselves will act as we would? Economists realizing the danger have turned to psychologists, but psychologists study motivation in general, outside any real context of situation. However useful this might be, it never comes near to the necessity of explaining the behaviour of the very different specific people who inhabit the world in specific situations and who are the product of specific histories. That can only be got from the kind of information that ethnography provides.' – Bloch 2017: 41

These two quotes illustrate a tension in anthropologists' opinions on the purpose and function of the discipline. Whereas Tett argues – in a book aimed at a general audience rather than at the academy – that anthropological ideas are useful in all contexts, Bloch asserts that it is context which makes ethnography valuable. Careful readers might note that Tett is discussing ideas whereas Bloch is discussing ethnographic practice. However, I maintain that it is impossible to disentwine theory from practice (Ingold 2014). I thus find myself aligning with Graeber and Abu-Lughod, who respectively caution that 'we tend to write as if theory is

concocted in a kind of autonomous bubble' (Graeber 2014: 84), when in fact theory develops both from ethnographic specificity and our own positionality as authors (Abu-Lughod 2006: 155). Given this entanglement between context and ideas, the obvious implication is appreciating that anthropological theorisation can never be fully divorced from the context in which it was developed. So, instead of asking if anthropologists can ever use theory out of context, perhaps a better question is *how* to better acknowledge the inevitable effects our personal-cum-professional contexts have on our understandings of our participants.

Here, I find Abu-Lughod's (2006) paper 'against culture' of great help. Her general argument is that anthropologists' interest in 'culture' is itself problematic as it promotes the very difference it purports to translate:

> I will argue that "culture" operates in anthropological discourse to enforce separations that inevitably carry a sense of hierarchy. Therefore, anthropologists should now pursue, without exaggerated hopes for the power of their texts to change the world, a variety of strategies for writing against culture. For those interested in textual strategies, I explore the advantages of what I call "ethnographies of the particular' … In telling stories about particular individuals in time and place, [by] focusing closely on particular individuals and their changing relationships, one would necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness. (Abu-Lughod 2006: 153; 162)

The utility of Abu-Lughod's argument to this conclusion is two-fold. First it challenges me to admit the limits of my investigation in the first place. Abu-Lughod, along with an earlier feminist anthropologist Henrietta Moore, cautions against hiding behind ethnocentrism. My acknowledgement of my positionality, as a non-Native anthropologist writing in a British context, is not the same as rectifying power imbalances in the discipline. Some might argue that British sociocultural anthropologists inevitably use Euro-American ideas to understand Native American discourse – why is it therefore inappropriate to use Native American ideas to understand my participants in the United Kingdom? In avoiding using theories such as survivance out of context, do we not run the risk of 'ghettoizing' Indigenous thought, much as feminist anthropologists were ghettoised into women's studies (Moore 1988: 5)? Are we thus guilty of perpetuating Euro-American perspectives as the epistemological default? After all, my very assertion that we should not appropriate survivance out of context evidences a biased assumption that the 'we' I am addressing is not Native. The second utility of Abu-Lughod's work for my analysis – a practical utility, which avoids a digressive poetics of *Writing culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) – concerns language.

Abu-Lughod questions why anthropologists are so interested in using and borrowing anthropological terminology to increase their supposed authority (2006: 159). She begs the question of why we do not, in our analysis, use words and phrases more familiar to our participants. If William had never hitherto heard of 'survivance', why should I impose this idea upon him? I here wish to confess to my own short-sightedness in inserting language where it is not welcome. Consider the following exchange I had with one of my participants:

Marshall: Do you think it is hard for people to foster a sense of community given the fact NF1 is such a variable condition?

NFC Employee: I don't know what 'NF community' is. I'm not really sure what that is. I think, from a medical point of view, there's a bunch of doctors and nurses who have been in the field quite a long time, and I suppose that's a medical community in that we all share and use the same skills and knowledge, we all share the aim of wanting to help patients. Does that extend to patients? I don't know. There are so many patients with NF1. With NF2, it's slightly different because there's a smaller patient group, but again, my [NF2] patients wouldn't think of themselves as a community.

I should note that William is also quick to rectify my linguistic slips. He has corrected me on several occasions. An instance which always comes to my mind is when I mistakenly said 'passed away': William had already specified he prefers the more direct term, 'died' – a preference which I should expect and respect from someone so passionate about euthanasia advocacy and candid conversations about death. I find this realisation – on the dangers of inserting language, Native or otherwise – helps offer a resolution to my dilemma. I can utilise Vizenor's survivance to unpack facets of my participants' experience, but ultimately, I should use language specific to my participants' context to account for their experiences. To put Abu-Lughod's recommendation to the test, I wish to close my investigation by examining an ethnographic book which I believe well-balances idiosyncratic terminology with general anthropological interest and out-of-context language.

Calkins (2016) does not mention either Vizenor or survivance. However, I have found her writing both relevant and exceptional in its ability to attend to the contextually specific whilst still referencing broader theorisation. One of Calkins' analytic tools is uncertainty. She writes that there is uncertainty in all action because outcomes are always unknown – but that uncertainty is not a *uniform* property of all action since it is perceived and experienced differently depending on context (Calkins 2016: 2). Calkins conducted fieldwork among rural families in Sudan. In this context, 'uncertainty is processed and managed in a situation of scarcity' (2016: 6). Calkins is quite clear that she is not attempting to represent all the lives and social forms in the geographic area she studied. She states that she is instead looking at a universal dimension of human experience by focusing on the small and specific (2016: 7), thus exemplifying Abu-Lughod's recommendations on the utility of ethnographies of the specific. Calkins – in my opinion – is brilliant precisely because she is aware of when she is talking about the specific and when she is talking about abstract or universal phenomena. Calkins writes that her discussions of survival and uncertainty do not concern war, as was the focus of her colleagues who attended to resisting Muslim Arab identities, but instead centres on 'the daily struggle of getting by when little is at hand to actually make a living and receive one's bread.'

Part of Calkins' successful precision can, I believe, be attributed to her qualification of analytic terms. She talks of 'subtypes of uncertainty' (Calkins 2016: 5) and brackets and differentiates 'based upon the degree of reflexivity with which the knowledge in the situation itself is questioned' (Calkins 2016: 7). Reflexivity, in her writing, refers to critical probing about premises and grounds of interpretations and actions (Calkins 2016: 3). To give another example of her qualifying analytic terms, one needs only look to a moving comparison wherein

she highlights that, 'We can hardly claim that the uncertainties experienced daily by [my participant] Rashaida in north-eastern Sudan are the same uncertainties that people experience elsewhere when engaging in highly risky activities, for instance, at the London Stock Exchange.' (Calkins 2016: 12) Her participants must 'secure their survival', and that makes all the difference.

My participants are in a markedly different situation to Calkins'. One of my key participants, Sharon, notes that a significant struggle for her is resisting overindulging in food. And yet, I find Calkins' writing on reflexivity of great relevance. Just as survivance helps me articulate to the natalist components of William's experience, Calkins' writing on reflexivity in the face of uncertainty may in turn help me attend to my participants' existential reflections. So, again, while Calkins' work is relevant to my own, just as Vizenor's writing are, and while I can and should acknowledge their impact on my theorisation, I should endeavour to let my participants speak for themselves by ultimately relying on language specific to them. 'Conceptual tools' – as termed by Calkins – are important, even necessary. But they are not a replacement for a full account our of participants' experiences and philosophies in their own words.

I wish to close with a final quote by William. While I do not put stock in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis per se, I find I concur with William's sentiment – and perhaps I have more work to do vis-à-vis disagreeing with my participants' analysis. In my very first meeting with William, he cautioned:

> Words are loaded. I don't know if you know that saying, 'language does not just describe reality, language also creates the reality it describes'. Language creates the reality that it describes. Yeh? And it does. Look at the word 'terrorist' for instance. Who gets called a terrorist and who doesn't? And yet they might have done identical things. Words are loaded. And I think, particularly, you know, when it comes to things that make us different from each other, they make you see things through a particular lens. So, calling something a 'disease' or a 'condition' or a 'problem' – particularly if you call it a problem – who is it a problem for? Is the problem for you or is it a problem for me?

William is careful with his language, and I owe it to him to be precise with my own. After all, Vizenor's purpose in writing about survivance was to write against lazy and inaccurate caricatures of Native Americans. If there is any universal, it should be that there is no room for the laziness of shorthand, approximations, or placeholders. All participants deserve their own language.

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BODIES-IN-CRISIS: BEAUTY, NARRATIVE, AND THE MANAGEMENT OF DISPERSAL

ALEXIA LIAKOUNAKOU[1]

This paper investigates how multiple crises facing Greek society are prompting individuals to intensely focus on their bodies, as bodies become perceived as the only palpable object on which humans can have direct control. It argues that crises generate a kind of personal and existential hyper-awareness, making people penetratingly aware of how much their depressed, anxious, ageing and otherwise 'decaying' bodies might signify a more general sense of degradation. In their effort to maintain a sense of control and prevent dispersal, as it were, these bodies, ('bodies-in-crisis') become a physical location where affective negotiations for agency, transformation and survivance occur. By engaging with the concept of survivance, feminist and postfeminist scholarship on gender and cosmetic surgery, and the anthropological literature on Greece as well as the work on 'crisis' and precarity, this paper seeks to reposition the Greek woman who desires cosmetic beautification. By offering rich ethnographic material from Athens, it argues that socioeconomic upheavals may push individuals to focus more intensely and 'selfishly' on their own selves and bodies, rather than mobilize in order to act in an unselfish manner for the public good. Such self-indulgence in turbulent times should not be dismissed as unserious or unworthy of anthropological study, however, for the practice might equally expose the core of what it's like to live inside profound uncertainty.

Keywords: Greece, cosmetic surgery, crisis, feminism

Introduction

> *What stories do we tell ourselves in order to stay afloat?*
> —Hua Hsu, New Yorker

In September 2022, I presented a paper at the 8th Congress of the Portuguese Anthropological Association, with the title 'Beauty in uncertain times.' The paper examined

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the rise and popularity of cosmetic pharmaceuticals (such as Botox and anti-ageing 'fillers') and a variety of other cosmetic treatments in Greece during the period of financial collapse which began in 2008. The premise guiding my presentation was that within an environment of austerity and under the weight of consecutive crises, cosmetic interventions get associated with positive feelings of taking control. According to the reasoning of the women I have interviewed, fascination with cosmetic medicine provides a motive to exercise self-care on a body that is in danger of dispersal, and they consider their 'feeling good' as arising from their active 'doing *something*', instead of letting the body decay. The body is thus perceived as the only accessible, palpable object on which these women can have a certain amount of control.

The paper sparked an intense conversation. During this a fellow anthropologist asked me: 'Why don't these women mobilize in a different manner?'. Her question reveals a major challenge (not just within anthropology) in positioning the cosmetic medical patient. Davis (1995) has infamously labelled this the 'feminist dilemma', whereby the cosmetic patient can be seen as either vulnerable and manipulated by the beauty system (Davis 1995: 4; see also Ortner 2006; Wolf 2002) or, oppositely, 'empowered' in their choice (Pitts-Taylor 2009; Bordo 2003; Negrin 2002; 2008) to seek cosmetic transformation. Striking a balance between these two opposing views can be a difficult exercise for the ethnographer, who also needs to acknowledge the grip aesthetic medicine (like all medicine) has on society, as a form of biopower (Jarrin 2017).

The feminist debates which place great importance on the question of agency have formed the theoretical bedrock on which I stand. However, as I moved from being a young scholar to becoming an early career researcher, these theories also progressively became restrictive in approaching and allowing me to comprehend my interlocutors in the field. The dichotomy that guides the agency debate does not allow the ethnographer to fully approach interlocutors such as my own, who seemed, both in their use of words but also through their actions, to consider themselves as part of a world which greatly affected and shaped their own decisions and their self-image, yet that didn't impede their capacity to choose or act as free agents. Fully accepting that their selves were webbed in relationships with others, and that they were affected by images, movements, fashion trends and other dynamics (such as the biopower exercised on them by science and medicine), they nevertheless felt and experienced concerns about their bodies as deeply personal, profoundly significant, and unique. Their anxieties about the body were also enmeshed with other personal anxieties about problems and challenges regarding personal relationships, employment problems and perceived failures, but also major negative changes in society and their immediate social environment, as this paper will show. Moreover, much of the feminist literature on the matter disregards the extent to which 'fitting in' (rather than 'standing out') provides, for the majority of individuals, a source of the comfort and calm that was actively sought after by my own interlocutors in Greece.

My response to the questioner at the conference was that to demand that the women in my study mobilize in a way that we as academics or as feminists approve of, would be to adopt an ethical and judgmental stance, which I didn't feel comfortable taking towards my interlocutors. From what I understood quite early on, 'mobilization' for my interlocutors meant an intense focus on their bodies as the only vehicle, object, or realm on which they

could exercise any amount of control. For them, beauty and bodily improvement were not separated from the experience of uncertainty and crisis, but were in fact interlinked, and this intimate relationship between beauty and crisis generated what I call the *body-in-crisis.*

This body-in-crisis is in a state of constant awareness and hypervigilance. It experiences anxiety over the volatility that comes with the unknown. And the 'unknown' in question isn't simply an unknown state but is actually a projection of a negative experience of the present onto a looming, threatening canvas that is the future. As Eriksen (2001: 3) asserts, us 'high moderns' live with our gaze firmly fixed towards the immediate future, and we are taught to think and imagine or *speculate* about what is coming (Komporozos-Athanasiou 2022: 13), thus we constantly navigate the world by relying on our speculative powers to tackle uncertainty. Nevertheless, by occupying a 'crisis state', our speculative capacity is affected to the extent that we project our ominous presents onto the near future, which seems at best dark and unpromising and, at worst, anticipates the total annihilation of humanity and other living beings. And within such a climate of uncertainty and great pessimism about the future, individuals whom I studied directed their anxieties towards their own bodies in the present. To them, mobilizing beyond one's own personal space often seemed futile in the face of global catastrophes. Their bodies, in turn, were perceived as the only 'thing that matters', in an otherwise senseless and uncontrollable world. We can find echoes of these processes in Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011: 4), in which the author argues that a sustained focus on the present isn't invariably shallow presentism, or a kind of narcissism, but rather a process of 'managing incoherent narratives' and messages coming in from the world around us. The body-in-crisis may exhibit self-indulgent behaviour in its fight for *inclusion versus exclusion* (Banet-Weiser et al 2020: 6). And as recent interrogations within the postfeminist movement have illustrated, 'female' practices such as beautification, bodily grooming and cosmetic transformations may envelop several struggles: gender, class, racial, or a combination of the above.

This study is a result of field research undertaken in Athens from 2014 to 2019, primarily in cosmetic clinics, where I conducted participant observation, after securing the informed consent of participants. A second method of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with several participants. These interviews were repeated several times, offering me, with every encounter, a deeper understanding of the affective processes surrounding these treatments, the world of cosmetic beauty and how one feels upon entering it. Moreover, it tried to tackle the 'cosmetic question' in the longer-term, by the consecutive revisiting and the retelling of patient accounts, so that a fuller picture would emerge regarding the ways cosmetic medicine appeals to women.

This method also allowed for greater reflexivity for me, the ethnographer. In the early stages of research, I assumed that the women I would encounter would be affluent and oblivious to the dangers and the precarity faced by other, less affluent women, or that – at least – they would enjoy a certain amount of financial security.
Yet the women whom I met formed a varied mix of social, cultural, and financial backgrounds, with some facing quite serious challenges, financially or otherwise, in their day-to-day lives. For example, I met a migrant Albanian woman who cleaned houses to make a living, and who often compared herself to her (Greek) employer in a way that seemed to say 'I, too, can do

these treatments', thus claiming a space for herself in a world that is usually occupied by Greek women, and as a way to transgress and challenge her minority status and her invisibility as a migrant worker (Hollibaugh and Weiss 2015).

I also encountered a Roma woman who, at a dermatology outpatient clinic, pulled out a handful of cash to give the cashier at the clinic's checkout, and dashed out as quickly and quietly as possible, holding the layered, multi-coloured skirt to her knees as she descended the stairs, then vanishing around the corner of the building. I met wealthy, or at least well-off, young and middle-aged women, and a few medical tourists, who came from Northern or Western Europe to combine summer leisure with a series of cosmetic treatments that would cost double or triple the price back home. Through such and many other encounters, I discovered that the cosmetic clinics were simply a microcosm of the life outside them, and that cosmetic beauty was as ubiquitous as, say, going to the gym, and perceived as a vital form of self-management and self-care, rather than a luxury. It also brought me face-to-face with my own assumptions, untangling a whole web of ideas I held around 'vanity' and 'beautification', as a Western-trained academic.

Survivance: a useful framework for studying uncertainty?

Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance is based on Native American stories of defiance and survival against genocidal practices, widespread institutional oppression, and systemic violence. It is defined quite ambiguously, as 'an active sense of presence over absence' (Vizenor 2008: 1) and as 'narrative resistance to […] victimry' (Vizenor 2009: 1). It is perhaps deliberately left open to interpretation. Some scholars see in these words resistance; others see endurance. I believe Kroeber (2008: 25) has more succinctly distilled the meaning of the word in the Vizenorian sense, by seeing in survivance a subtle reduction of the power of the destroyer, and the marginal flight from annihilation.

'What does survivance have in common with cosmetic medical applications?', readers may ask. How could a concept used to describe the struggle of a persecuted group to the point of genocide be compared to Greek women who consume aesthetic treatments? It may come across as sacrilege to hint at any such comparison, however distant. My intention is not to compare the two, however, or to question which is more severe. What I wish to propose instead is a theoretical model to examine the consumption of aesthetic treatments in Greece, through the key ideas put forward by Vizenor and his theory of survivance and focus on one aspect of survivance in particular: narrativization.

Greek women may not be living under the threat of persecution as is the case of Vizenor's Native American subjects. However, there is an intense and pervasive feeling among my Greek interlocutors that precarity, uncertainty, economic collapse, widespread unemployment, political unrest, wars and epidemics, the climate crisis, and the ripple effects brought on by these realities to personal and collective existences form a kind of everyday violence. The threat may not be death or persecution, but the feeling of being exposed to grave and potentially life-threatening – or at least life-altering – challenges has been palpable in the past decade. Moreover, ruptures in the linkages between the past, present and future,

new models of personhood vis-à-vis public life, as well as the constant creation of fragmented social categories create an enhanced sense of bewilderment (Weiss 2004: 1).

The present may feel disorganized and precarious, sometimes violently so, under sociopolitical and economic structures that are built on creating desires based on a set of ever-elusive promises which remain just that: promises, and under a system which increasingly widens the gap between those who not only *have* and *have not*, but those who *can* and those who *cannot*. The good life is sought after, but can people truly attain it, and if so, at what cost? And does it ever satisfy? Most are left with an 'overwhelming ordinary' (Berlant 2011:8) which is cruel because it fails to deliver the satisfaction or happiness it had promised (Ahmed 2010), and because it seems to keep people in a constant state of precarity (Berlant 2011: 192).

The literature on uncertainty has pushed ethnographers to be more attuned to their subjects' felt indeterminacies of being (Calkins 2016: 46). Such felt indeterminacies, which immediately impact embodied experience, are at the core of my work. In writing about cosmetic pharmaceuticals and related technologies in Greece during the height (or the depth) of austerity, I was urged to look at the everyday life of the women I spoke with, and noticed how the theme of pain resurfaced, time and again, in the narratives they used to describe their lives.

Sacrifices

Panayiota's face was *skammeno* (dug out or scuffed) as they say in Greek – an agricultural metaphor. Very tan and durable, it did in fact remind me of the earth's surface. She had creases running across her cheeks and around her eyes. She gave the impression of a hardened personality as well, which had been toughened by life. Her hair was cut very short, with thick grey and white streaks revealing themselves at the roots. Her clothes were of a pair of denim trousers, a long-sleeve top and her shoes a sturdy, army-style pair of boots with chunky soles. I asked her some basic questions to start the interview, like what she did for a living.

> 'If I tell you… you won't believe me', Panayiota retorted, and her eyes looked away. She seemed nervous. She then added: 'I was a hairdresser for many years'.

> 'And, what… are you ashamed of that?'

> 'I'm not ashamed of that. I'm ashamed because… well… a woman who worked in the beauty business should not have let herself end up like I have! I have gained much weight. I've let myself go, very much. Look at my skin! These past few years have not been easy at all. I neglected myself completely.' After a brief pause, she continues by saying: 'It's hard… I've been taking full care of my two grandchildren. One is four, the other seven. A boy and a girl. Their mother – my daughter – abandoned them. She met someone and took off to England. It's been two years already. I have to take the girl to a psychiatrist two times a week… she isn't able to deal with her mother's flight. And I have a husband to take care of. Now, I also have two grandchildren under my care. I'm exhausted.

> I barely have time for myself. This is the first time off I've had in two years, to do something *gia mena* (about me)'.

Pain is a central and recurring theme in many ethnographies on Greece, and it fares more notably in the work focusing on women. According to Seremetakis (1998: 151), this is due to the gendered nature of pain in Greece, with suffering seen as being a 'natural' aspect of female life. In Greece, caring responsibilities fall disproportionately on the shoulders of women, who are believed to be biologically – 'naturally' – skilled in caring, and who are raised in a cultural environment that promotes motherhood as the ultimate goal and destination in a woman's life (Paxson 2004). The family is considered a sacred institution and the figure of the mother, portrayed as 'the pillar' of the family, is associated strongly with the image of Panayia (Holy Mary), who personifies the ultimate Mother, who can endure endless sacrifices and pain in her quest to ensure the wellbeing of those in her care. (Fittingly enough, the name 'Panayiota' derives from Panayia). The pressure to live up to this ideal, to be a 'good mother' and be a selfless, self-sacrificing figure, is especially potent in Greece (Tsouroufli 2020). Fiction and folk literature is replete with heroic, self-sacrificing mothers who suffer or offer their own lives to protect their offspring or other close kin, and these enduring themes are echoed in the words of Panayiota. The self-sacrificing role is also extended to the grandmother, who is perceived as being a 'double mother', and whose caring responsibilities accelerate – or get renewed – with the birth of grandchildren. The grandmother is usually tasked with taking over the care of the grandchild, at least partially, while the mother goes back to work. Maternal grandmothers are usually the ones to undertake this task, due to their proximity to the child's mother, who is perceived as the primary and most important caretaker. And in unfortunate cases, such as Panayiota's, the motherly sacrifice extends to the grandchildren: the mother tragically abandons her offspring, and the 'double mother' sacrifices herself in hoping to fill the void left behind by her daughter.

However, we could read Panayiota's statement through another prism, one that is less self-sacrificing. Here, the concept of poetics might prove useful, first utilized by Herzfeld in his descriptions of Cretan male performativity. Herzfeld's famous poetics of manhood (dedicated to the Cretan men in his ethnographic studies) gave inspiration to Dubisch (1991) in applying the term to Greek women, as well, thus offering a more nuanced contouring of aspects of female behaviour in Greece. Poetics is more subtle than performance, and it involves addressing the historical and ideological processes which manifest in women's performativity (Herzfeld 1991:81); it involves the less obvious ways by which women in Greece express, or manipulate, their inferior position in society.

For Herzfeld, poetics of womanhood could include the use of irony to challenge masculine power dynamics, exemplified in the following quote: 'A Greek woman can quite seriously maintain to outsiders that her sex is inferior to the male while internally mocking the men of her kin-group and community for insisting on the exact same claim' (Herzfeld 1991: 80). For Dubisch, less playfully, the poetics of womanhood finds ultimate expression in the narrativizing of a woman's suffering. These narratives usually take the form of a complaint or an extended 'lament' (of the kind I have offered here, conferred in Panayiota's interview above, and Liza's, below) and whose purpose is to a) externalize an internally felt pain or

express anger, and b) to be heard. Suffering is verbalized as a way of emphasizing women's proximity to pain in their everyday life, as Dubisch has noted, and complaints about suffering may serve the role of a continuous reminder (to men, and to the whole of society) of the lengths and troubles women go through both physically and emotionally in order to keep others satisfied. These feats, unless they are voiced, go largely unrecognized. Laments and grievances, therefore, are the 'available cultural material' (Dubisch 1995: 216) from which the poetics of womanhood spring forth. And for Seremetakis (1998: 151), such narrativizations of pain should not be narrowly read as mere complaint, passive fatalism, or idiosyncratic conduct, but rather as an organizing force of communication and presence. This reading of female Greek poetics closely matches Vizenor's concept of 'narrative presence', for it underlines the desire by the complainant to be *heard* and therefore recognized as a presence, rather than a silence or an absence.

Liza was – at the time of initial research – a 21-year-old working as a plastic surgeon's assistant. She was an attractive brunette, sociable and friendly, who had come to Athens from a distant village near the border with Turkey. Her skin at the time still bore the marks of her recent puberty, with little spots and scars visible on her cheeks, which she carefully covered with makeup. She usually wore red lipstick, and a bold, sweet fragrance. By working in a cosmetic clinic and by being exposed to these treatments' day in and day out, she has a characteristic carefree attitude towards cosmetic medicine. She considered it 'as normal as putting on makeup'. For her, a filler injection on the lips is 'just something you do, if you desire to plump your lips'. There is no questioning 'why', because – to her – it would be like asking why someone would wear lipstick.

> One warm afternoon, I found her sitting at the cafeteria where we normally held our interviews, and she was extremely sad. She absent-mindedly looked down, at the pavement, where pigeons picked at leftover food and breadcrumbs, while I sat down across from her. Without even looking at me, she said:
>
> 'Did you see the news? My whole village has been levelled to the ground…'.
>
> Indeed, as I was walking to my field site that same morning, I had read about a powerful earthquake which had hit the easternmost islands of Greece, which also caused widespread damage to towns on the Turkish shoreline. Her village's name, which – until that day – I'd never heard of, had suffered the greatest damage.
>
> At the age of eighteen, Liza left her hometown and came to Athens to become a beauty specialist. She stayed on, because finding work back home would be 'very difficult, if not impossible', as she had told me. In Athens, she occupied a small room at her father's house, a man from whom she had been estranged for twelve years, after he left her mother to pursue a new life in the city. She reconnected with him after a long period of absence, and they made a deal that she would stay at his house until she could afford a place of her own.

'I look at the pictures and I feel like I am looking at scenes from a war. ….
Everything is destroyed. My townspeople have lost their homes; some are dead.
And I'm here, away from my family, unable to go back. I'm so shocked, I don't
know what to do… I just have to sit here and look at the videos people post
on social media and on the news, unable to do anything.' She then took out her
phone and showed me pictures posted by a friend on Facebook.

'This is my neighbour's house', she said, pointing to a pile of ruins laying in front
of an exposed tiled bathroom. I noticed how the bathroom looked
embarrassingly exposed.

'This is the house of Kyria Eleni. My neighbour. She died'.

An earthquake like this, I thought to myself at that moment, is not only tragic,
but it becomes a vivid reminder that all that humans build, and especially the
edifices that conceal us, can be annihilated in a second. Tragedies strip down
privacy, and there no longer exists a demarcation between what is private and
what is public. Everything is exposed, like those bathroom tiles.

'What about your own family?', I asked.

'My family, thank God, is fine. But you can't imagine the agony I went through
until I spoke to them.'

'Will you go visit?'

'I can't go back because the flight costs four hundred euros…! That's more than
my monthly salary… And the boat takes two days to get there and back. And I
can only afford to be away on weekends… I can't leave work, so, I can't take
the boat.'

Liza has often expressed frustration about her challenging financial situation. It was after this
encounter, however, that I truly understood why she 'felt trapped' and 'stuck' in Athens,
which may have offered some opportunities, compared to none back in her hometown, but
not the kind of opportunities she had imagined before arriving to the city.

Nearing the end of our session at the cafeteria, Liza broke into tears, thinking about
her neighbour who died.

I keep thinking about Kyria Eleni… I can't fathom how unbelievably miserable
her life had been, and how unfair to her! Her husband beat her… not
infrequently. She tried to leave him, twice. She took the kids with her, slept on
the street for two days. And no one helped her! The whole village turned a
blind eye, as if they had to be loyal to the husband…! So much for village
cooperation… Or maybe they just didn't want to get involved with that
psychopath. A few days later, *he* found her. *Tin ekane topi sto xylo* ('he beat the
crap out of her'). And the kids…! The boy came to school with a black eye.
And… what happened? She never left him in the end… how could she? Where
would she go? She had nowhere to go. Then, later, she had cancer, in the

stomach. She would come by our house, and would bring us food. Poor Kyria Eleni… She was so powerless and trapped; she was poor. And what happened in the end? Her own home flattened her. *What a life, huh...!'.* She paused briefly, gathering her breath. 'Is life even worth living? This is what I wonder these days', she said despairingly, with a tone of anger simmering beneath her words.

I don't have a life here… I work all day, I go home at night, and sleep at a house which is not even mine… But I work. And I work at a job that I like, which allows me to be around women and we do all this interesting stuff… and I learn so much! And I think that this job, this environment, the clinic, and everything we do there is the only thing that has kept me sane. I feel like I don't have much control over life right now, or generally. This is such a crazy time… But when I'm in the clinic, I feel like at least I can control something, as if something still matters.

Heather Paxson (2004: 2) has noted that many contemporary Athenian women have been raised by parents who grew up in a rural setting, away from the city, where social personhood was established through domestic, blood- and spiritual kin relationships. In the city, life has been secularized and women have joined the workforce in very large numbers, therefore a steady income contributes to their sense of self and self-realization. Liza's case is characteristic of a young Greek woman living with limited family assistance and basic means in austerity-Greece. I calculated that her paid intern salary, after deducting taxes, was around 380 euros a month – an extremely small amount for getting by in the city, for it barely covers rent. Her job is described as her only comfort, replacing the types of emotional and perhaps even financial comfort that would, in a past setting, be provided by matrimony, but it still sounded as if she felt desperate.

Liza's precarity and despair perfectly distil the 'crisis experience'. She seems to talk about it as an unmistakably and eternally female story, as it condenses the perpetual struggle faced by Greek women (Dubisch 1986; 1995). This is especially captured in the narration of her neighbour's story, summarized as a miserable, unworthy life. Liza's life course, in turn, is portrayed as miserable. Her life story, which had been envisioned as a stable and planned upward mobile curve as she was reaching adulthood (leave the village, move to the capital, study, find a job, and then perhaps find a spouse) was being tested, and even defeated, with every passing day. Then, the tragic unravelling caused by the earthquake and the sudden, violent destruction of her home shattered her sense of security: her 'shelter' and foundation, as most Greeks perceive their family home (*patriko spiti*). And, suddenly, her job became a kind of last resort and anchor, the only aspect of her life which entailed some sense of stability and a hope for the future: a prospect for change towards the better, and not for the worse. Her narration also points to the kind of 'sanity' beautification spaces offer women, as self-care rituals enable the body to maintain a sense of wholeness in a climate of weathering and total dispersion. Her account is also dotted with the subtle – or perhaps not so subtle – poetics I mention above: a sense of anger and despair against the unfairness and inequality that women experience not only as Greeks living inside uncertainty and 'crisis' but as women in a precarious and male-dominated society.

A few days after this emotionally charged interaction with Liza, I met two close friends – Thetis and Eva, aged seventy-three – who went to see a cosmetic surgeon together. In their conversation, they started gossiping about another, third friend, who did cosmetic injections secretly from her husband. When I asked them why she keeps it a secret, they responded: 'Because her husband considers [these things] a waste of money!'. Then, Thetis added: 'It's madness, if you think about it! In this day and age…! Is this woman not entitled to some personal time, some dignity?'

We, contemporary anthropologists, are trained to first and foremost look out for overt or, more commonly, covert forms of oppression, guided by a vast, and important, literature that has managed to unpack the many ways via which bodies are monitored, improved, groomed, and managed by states, institutions, and forms of biopower. But within this existence of being monitored, managed, and improved exist immeasurable 'micro-realities' that are exceptional, unique, and personal. And within these realities, beautification or self-improvement might acquire different meanings and significance. Although all societies are exposed to forms of biopower, and all individuals are subjugated to disciplinarian and/or oppressive discourses and regimes (to varying degrees), there exist not only subtle differences but vast chasms between the experience of one person to the next. A good example is how the experience of older women in Greece, most of whom were still dependent on some form of male dominance (usually the husband who provided money from a regular salary), differed from that of more independent and younger urban women (employed in their own right). It became apparent quite early on, that to deal with such differences, I would have to become a lot more attuned to the varying and distinct realities of these women.

Individuals belonging to the same society will be exposed to similar messages, but they will not all get monitored, managed, improved, and groomed in the same way. We all get 'groomed for capitalism', to use O'Donnell's (2021) phrase, but we do not do so in the same manner. Seeing beyond the unifying gaze of concepts such as capitalism, medical science and biopower, and approaching beauty not only as a neoliberal spreadsheet which requires a constant benchmarking of the self (McRobbie, 2015: 9), but as something we all (and not just women who consume cosmetic treatments) are exposed to and get affected by in various degrees throughout our lives, in many different ways, we can begin to discern how each story, when looked at close enough, can reveal an array of 'thin' particularities. For don't we all 'style ourselves' (Ochoa 2014: 2) in dialogue with spectacles and symbols we extract from our environments and the media?

'Doing something for me'

In *The history of sexuality* Foucault (1994) considers *epimeleia eautou*, the ancient notion of self-care. He demonstrates that in Greece of the pre-Christian period, caring for the self was elevated to an art and a practice (*askesis*) to be perfected. Caring for the self was not considered a sinful or vain practice, but instead abetted the self-realization and overall health of man. 'To take care of yourself' was a main principle for individuals in the ancient cities (1988: 19), even though, for us contemporaries, the notion has taken on new and different

meanings. Caring for the self-gained much less significance in Western thought after Christianity took over following antiquity (1988), giving way to the rise of the famous Delphic principle *gnothi sauton* ('know yourself')' as the central theme in the pursuit of personal improvement. Western philosophy thus placed an overemphasis on the latter and neglected the former, even though the ancients saw 'know thyself' and 'take care of yourself' as interconnected, complementary practices.

For Socrates, as Foucault (1988: 25) maintains, the care of the self is also an exercise in discovering one's identity. This search on the one hand soothes and appeases the soul, and is on the other hand combined with an 'external', as it were, understanding of the self, as seen by others: 'You have to worry about your soul – that is the principal activity of caring for yourself', Foucault cites from *Alcibiades*; 'the soul cannot know itself except by looking at itself in a similar element, a mirror' (Foucault 1988: 25). If we risked seeing the cosmetic medical spaces and the treatments taking place inside them as a kind of modern-day Stoic exercise in care of the self, and a practice in 'seeing the self through others', we can draw some very interesting parallels between the ancient practice of self-care and the contemporary care of the self via cosmetic means.

> Taking care of the self is not a rest cure. There is the care of the body to consider, health regimens, physical exercises without overexertion, the carefully measured satisfaction of needs. […] Around the care of the self, there developed an entire activity of speaking and writing in which the work of oneself on oneself and communication with others were linked together (Foucault 1984: 51).

In a similar vein, the women I met during my fieldwork often claimed that the cosmetic encounter was their only 'me-time': a space and time carved out specifically for themselves and devoted to improving their physical appearance and emotional wellbeing. They perceived it as a personal ritual, which they only shared, on certain occasions, with a close friend. And beauty rituals, or 'personal rituals', as Barthel (2010: 151) calls them, are meant to provide 'drama to culture', by marking points of transformation from one state to another – day to night, work to leisure, public to private.

And although such rituals are performed in private, they are not separated from social participation but rather act as a 'gateway to sociality' (Barthel 2010: 151). In my interlocutors' understanding, private rituals (as these cosmetic sessions were perceived), were likened to a 'preparation stage' prior to going 'back into the world' – a world that would remind them of the harsh realities they were facing. Their rituals acted very much like Barthel's definition of a frame: 'ritual takes a piece of reality and gives it character and definition; it endows the everyday with special meaning' (Barthel 2010: 152). And for my interlocutors, these 'rituals' formed a kind of momentary, soothing escape from the 'dread' and 'toxicity' (to use my interlocutors' words) outside. It became a therapeutic exercise, not due to its end-result (the beautifying effect, or the sense of improvement) but through the act itself: just by dedicating a special 'window' of time to the self, the cosmetic ritual became significant and imbued with positive feelings, even before it was actually realized.

And if cosmetic encounters are indeed a form of private ritual, there are some very interesting properties we can choose to focus on to understand the relation between the body and crisis, stability and destabilization, certainty and uncertainty, demarcation and dispersal. Many social scientists see rituals as essential in the process of promoting order; not because rituals are necessarily reproductive of existing orders but precisely because they provide space for *reimagining* orders (Leander 2021: 307). For Victor Turner, coming of age rituals and rites of passage are described as crucial for dealing with the inherent instability in life, its contradictions, and tensions. For Dubisch, ritual seeks to create order and 'fix social reality' (Dubisch 1995: 15). These readings are contiguous to the seminal and well-known work by Myerhoff and Moore (1977: 16), in which they declare that ritual becomes a declaration or form against indeterminacy (and thus anticipating Vizenor's concept of survivance) – a fight for survival, and a declaration of presence instead of absence. We could also see in these processes Ochoa's 'logic of the body' (2014: 156): a way for the body to make *sense* of its place in the world, in an act of self-determination. Rituals may also form a personal struggle to instil order on an otherwise chaotic world, and an unruly body. Pulling back the cheeks that start to droop, and 'erasing' the lines and creases which dot the face are an effort to bring order to the accelerating disorder that ageing affords.

Concluding thoughts

> 'One day, I looked at myself in the rear-view mirror in the car, after a long day at work. I was shocked – I didn't recognize myself. "*Who* is this old lady?" I thought to myself. I booked a Botox appointment with the doctor right then and there!'
> – Olga, aged 43.

Old age can be experienced as self-effacing. Simone de Beauvoir (1965: 671) herself wrote, 'I loathe my appearance now; the eyebrow slipping down towards the eyes [...] that air of sadness around the mouth that wrinkles always bring.' And, as she notes in her authoritative *The Coming of Age* (1970), old age in Western societies arouses an instinctive, immediate disgust – or 'biological repugnance'. Many attempt to push it as far away as possible, refusing to admit that it will ever happen, even though we know we are all destined for it (Kirkpatrick and Kruks, 2022).

Gibson (2006: 53) has aptly described the experience of alienation, or disassociation, felt by people walking by a mirror or other reflective surface on the street, failing to recognize the old man or woman glancing back at them; or the moment of profound insight when they realize they are considered old in other people's eyes. These moments are, as Ursula K. le Guin, maintains, part and parcel of the *existential* situation comprising old age. And such feelings of terror have caused the medical and the cosmetic industries to surge and increasingly swell, in their effort to appease the ever-growing unease with which our societies approach the old and decaying body.

My interlocutors repeatedly focused on such widespread themes: the alienation felt by a woman who glanced at her face's reflection on her car's rear-view mirror, feeling shocked that her face looked 'so old, so tired'; or another interlocutor, Thetis, who saw cosmetic interventions as a way to retain one's dignity. And finally, a commonly felt belief that 'crisis' of the embracing and all-encompassing kind Greece and more widely Europe and the West is experiencing at the moment – may have caused even greater anxiety around the decaying body, causing it to be constantly alert and hypervigilant.

And although – in theory at least – beautification, self-enhancement and anti-ageing should not be prioritized in the face of great sociopolitical and financial tremors (and this commonly held belief is what urged the anthropologist at the conference to ask me 'why don't women mobilize differently'?), the research I undertook in Athens demonstrated just how much beauty and 'self-improvement' were considered serious matters, to be found at the core of the crisis experience and tightly connected to ideas of emotional and social survival, and not to be brushed aside as unimportant or superficial. The practice of grooming became central for many, in their quest to plant a seed of order and control inside a wider life experience which is becoming too anarchic and uncertain.

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AUSTERITY AS DISABLING: THE STATE AND UNCERTAINTY IN THE FUTURES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

MOLLY ACHESON[1]

This paper draws upon interviews conducted with parents to explore daily experiences of raising a child with disabilities. In particular, it looks at the cultural consequences of disability and the uncertainty that comes with raising a child with disabilities. In doing so, this paper follows existing literature in the field of the anthropology of disability in considering disability as culturally constructed. It also explores how the relationship with state services plays a significant role in shaping the extent to which parents feel that they are able to hope, and plan for the future. Past and current interactions, as well as dominant political and social discourses, leave many parents overwhelmed by feelings of worry and uncertainty, not just because they cannot imagine what the future will look like, but also because they do not trust that the welfare state will sufficiently provide for their child once they reach adulthood. This paper examines how parents manage these uncertainties. Through examining these manifestations of uncertainty and worry stemming from failures of state services I argue that, for these families, austerity is disabling.

Keywords: Disability, austerity, uncertainty, the state

Introduction

I first met Matthew's family as an undergraduate student at university. We were connected through a charity based in Oxford - me as a volunteer and Matthew as a participant with a rare chromosomal disorder and autism -and over the past few years we have built a close relationship. During this time, I learnt so much about the importance of family and friendships, but I also gained first-hand insights into life as a family with a disabled member, and the unique challenges that come with it.

One of these insights arises from a conversation I had with Matthew's parents in May 2021. They had just come from a phone call with Motability, a national scheme which works

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to provide transport solutions for disabled people in the UK. Ever since I had known Matthew, he had required walking aids for mobility within their home, and whenever we had gone outside, he had been using a wheelchair that his dad had pushed for him. However, as Matthew had grown (he was now 16 years old), this had presented more of a challenge, as the chair had become harder for his dad to push.

They explained that, following a lengthy application process, their request for a state-provided motorised chair had been denied. I was stunned. I knew the difficulties that mobility posed every day for Matthew and his parents, but, given that specialist wheelchairs can cost up to £25,000, for now Matthew they would have to wait.

Matthew's family, as it turns out, are not alone in this struggle. In 2018, the *Health Service Journal* reported that over 5,000 children in England waited over the four-month target for their equipment to be delivered — and this was those with approved applications (Ryan 2020: 100). Moreover, changes to the process, notably the introduction of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in 2013, meant that by 2018 over 40% of Motability clients had lost motorised equipment (Ryan 2020: 95).

Luckily for Matthew's family, however, the story does not end there. In July 2021, I received a WhatsApp message from Matthew's mum- a photograph of a beaming Matthew outside the Motability centre in his brand-new motorised wheelchair. My shock, as it turns out, was shared by his parents; they had only gone in expecting an assessment but, as Matthew had demonstrated sufficient skill, they had finally been able to take a chair home. We were thrilled. But this moment was also bittersweet; Matthew's parents should not have had to fight for this wheelchair.

Whilst all of us in the UK will at some stage rely on state-provided services, for disabled families this dependence is much greater. As a result, since 2010, austerity measures have hit the disabled community the hardest, with the state failing to provide some of the most basic of public services. To address these failures, the first step is to listen to disabled people and their families, to understand what their everyday struggles may be, and what they need to face them.

This article draws upon data collected through fieldwork carried out during Autumn 2021, and February 2022. This fieldwork consisted of semi-structured interviews with parents of disabled children[2]. Of the 8 interviews carried out, 2 went ahead in-person, and the rest via Microsoft Teams. Whilst I had predicted that conducting the interviews virtually might impact the kinds of conversations that we were able to have, especially considering that we were covering sensitive topics, I found this not to be the case. In reality, each interview proved insightful and highly valuable. In the interviews, we discussed the joys and barriers of everyday lives for these families, both in terms of practical difficulties, as well as social ones. We also

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[2] The participants of this study are Karen, and her 16-year old daughter Sophie who has cerebellar hypoplasia, Nick, and his 11-year old son Noah who has Down's syndrome, Lucy, and her 17-year old son Ollie who has Duchenne muscular dystrophy, Abigail, and her 15-year old daughter Freya who has a chromosome disorder, autism, epilepsy, and learning disabilities, Kate, and her 12-year old son Tommy who was autism, learning disabilities, and mild cerebral palsy, Naomi, and her 11-year old son Ciaran who has autism and ADHD, Phillipa, and her 16-year old son Joe who has Down's syndrome, and Olivia, and her 17-year old son Matthew who has a chromosome disorder and autism. All of the names used in this article are pseudonyms. All of the participants of this study live in the UK.

discussed participants hopes and worries for the future, and the ways in which they realistically saw the future for themselves and their children. Throughout the process, I was aware that the topics we were discussing were highly personal, and often emotional. Of course, the methods employed in the collection of data are not without their limitations. Given the relatively small number of people interviewed, it makes no wider claim to represent any given population and is instead a reflection of the experiences of those interviewed.

Of the eight people interviewed, seven identified as female, and one as male, and all of those interviewed identified themselves as the primary carer for their child. Six of the females and the one male interviewed were married, with partners who had continued to work, whilst one of the interview participants was a single mother. However, several of the participants did describe part-time work which they were involved in, which included volunteering in a charity shop, as well as creating educational resources for other parents, and care professionals. It seemed as though this work which did not involve directly caring for their child, was very important to the parents.

Becoming the parent of a child with a disability

The experience of parenting a child with a disability is marked by constant uncertainty. Although the diagnosis of a disability is, on one level, a medical one which brings about questions of health and treatment, it is also a social one. The idea that disability should be understood using a social model first emerged in the 1980s in response to approaches which were overly medicalised (Hughes and Paterson 1997). Medical models of disability were inadequate as they implied the problems faced by disabled people arose from a physiological origin, which could be corrected through physical therapy.

What it means to be disabled, and how this is impacted by social and cultural contexts is something which anthropologists are uniquely placed to examine. This is partly due to anthropology's focus on the Other, and the utility of the anthropological lens of culture. As argued by Reid-Cunningham (2009), consideration of the cultural barriers through which disabilities can be constructed provides a useful way of understanding disability as a cultural construct. She asserts that 'disability may be considered a culture, culture may be considered a disability, and cultural norms and values influence conceptions of disability' (Reid-Cunningham 2009: 99). An outcome of these social models of disability is the explicit argument that culture itself is disabling, exemplified by the fact that across different cultural contexts, some disabilities (for example, deafness) are not considered as such at all (McDermott and Varenne 1995). In a discussion of disability and uncertainty in the context of austerity, a separation of disability from its status as a bodily condition is important, as it encourages a consideration of the influences of cultural, social and political attitudes in shaping the disabled experience.

A key text in the field of disability anthropology is anthropologist Robert Murphy's 1987 book *The body silent.* When he was in his late 40s, working as an anthropologist, Murphy discovered that he had a tumour in his spine, one which would eventually irreversibly progress into quadriplegia. He uses an anthropological lens to explore themes of independence and

disability, and the cultural devaluation of disability in the US. A key observation that he made is the somewhat awkward relationship between the disabled and non-disabled, resulting from a cultural emphasis placed on physical perfection. Thus, he argues that discrimination against the disabled community stems from a kind of fear; 'we are subverters of the American Ideal, just as the poor are betrayers of the American Dream' (Murphy 1987: 116). His insights are illuminating for any kind of study of disability as he shares experiences of what it is like to be disabled: 'disability is not simply a physical affair for us; it is our ontology, a condition of our being in the world' (Murphy 1987: 90), whilst also articulating why disabled people face discrimination and alienation in American society: 'they are afflicted with a malady of the body that is translated into a cancer within the self and a disease of social relations' (Murphy 1987: 111).

Diagnosis: confronting the unexpected

> Everybody says, when you're pregnant, is that, 'what do you want, a boy or a girl?'. And everybody goes, 'oh, I don't really mind. So long as their healthy.'(Abigail)

A turning point in the journey of a parent of a child with a disability comes with the diagnosis. One thing that is common amongst parents is that, often, disability is entirely unexpected. When describing how they envisaged parenthood before having children, parents overwhelmingly described expecting ordinariness; their child is healthy and happy— and normal. Disability problematises narratives of perfectibility, rooted in developments in obstetric medicine and reproductive technologies (Rapp and Ginsburg 2001: 544). A key anthropological insight into these issues is provided by scholars, such as Kittay, Rapp, and Ginsburg, who have written openly about their personal experiences of parenting children with disabilities. A common experience shared by parents is how their child's diagnosis led to a kind of reconceptualisation of what it means to be a parent; 'the birth of anomalous children is an occasion for meaning-making' (Rapp and Ginsburg 2001: 536).

This is also explored by Landsman in her work looking at what it means to be the mother of a disabled child within a cultural climate of perfection, and a new age of reproductive technologies (Landsman 1998). Similarly, she argues that mothers feel a sense of responsibility and guilt for not producing a 'normal' child, which results in deliberate attempts to recognise and assert the personhood of their child, 'advocacy for one's disabled child becomes part of the identity of the mother, but it is born of the recognition of the child's humanity and of one's fear that the full value of the child is missed by others' (Landsman 1998: 87). As a result, the birth of a child with a disability is often highly anxiety-inducing for parents and families.

> My first reaction was, 'he just can't have muscular dystrophy, because that doesn't happen to us, that happens to other people.' (Lucy)

The treatment of the disabled as the 'Other' has been explored within anthropological literature on disability. As argued by many scholars, disability is no less a social diagnosis than it is a medical one; to be disabled is in many ways a social condition (Murphy 1987: 4). Thus, for a parent, diagnosis also brings about a total reconfiguration of what both their own and their children's lives will look like.

Mothers frequently tell stories of, upon giving birth to a disabled child, being commiserated instead of congratulated; one participant was advised by a healthcare worker to take time to grieve for the child she thought she was going to have. Responses such as this mean that sharing the news of disability, alongside the news of the birth, can present a unique challenge. Phillipa's son was diagnosed just a few days after he was born. She felt that it was important to share the news of his diagnosis with news of his birth, and she did so in cards which she sent to close friends and family.

> I felt like a bit of a fraud, because I thought, they're sending all these flowers and nice messages, and congratulations on your new baby. And you think, at some point, I've got to tell them that he's got Down's syndrome, and he's not the perfect baby. (Phillipa)

Phillipa's experience is reflective of the responsibility that mothers often feel upon not producing a 'normal' child, a narrative which is, again, reproduced within dominant perceptions of personhood. Furthermore, the responsibility that mothers feel to share the news of diagnosis alongside birth is reflective of the inextricable link made between the child and their disability. One of the cultural consequences of disability is that an individual's very identity as a 'full person' is called into question, and this is clearly something which can begin at birth (Luborsky 1994: 240).

Uncertainty: milestones and development

> My eldest stepson has got three children, and I remember him saying, 'Oh, well, they do this at such and such a stage.' And I remember biting my tongue, just because I wanted to say, 'if they're lucky'. (Karen)

The idea that personhood is linked with the development into 'normal' adulthood had been explored extensively in the anthropological literature. Understanding attitudes towards disability and independence in the UK also requires an analysis of how such perceptions intersect with dominant discourses surrounding personhood. Developments in the anthropology of personhood have sought to problematise the dichotomy between the Western individual and the 'dividual' of 'the rest' (Busby 1997; LiPuma 1998; Spiro 1993; Amit and Dyck 2006; Walker 2013). Whilst there is now a wealth of ethnographic evidence which illustrates the extent to which interdependence and relationality are highly important also for people in the West (McKearney 2021; Hollan 1992), the narrative of independence and personal autonomy still persists in the UK. However, one area in which this cultural conception is clearly problematised is the case of disability. For many disabled people, so-called 'full independence' is

neither possible nor desirable, and thus the dominant personhood discourse in the UK can be highly damaging and stigmatising.

Adulthood and personhood are often considered synonymously, and one achieves full personhood by completing certain prescribed stages of development; moving out of your home, finding employment, getting into relationships (Luborsky 1994). Parents of disabled children must therefore confront the fact that, in many cases, such milestones will not be reached by their children.

> At that period- at around a year - when babies are becoming toddlers, I remember all the time friends would say 'so is she walking?' and how that felt. And I look back, and I wish I could have had enough self-possession and lack of fear for it not to matter, but of course it matters. (Karen)

The assumed link between developmental milestones (walking, talking, reading) and growing up into a 'normal' person serves as a constant reminder of a child's difference. For parents, what this often means is that they are at every stage being told that their child falls outside of normality.

For parents, not only do narratives of personhood, dependence and care leave their child's very identity as a person questioned, but also what their future will look like as an overarching question. Uncertainty is derived from the question of what a child will be capable of in the future, as their development does not always align with that of the average child. Further, with complex disability comes non-linear development; a child may take their first steps at age four, but not be able to walk fully until eight. Therefore, families' ability to plan for the future is largely impacted by the extent to which they know what kinds of provisions will be necessary for their child once they reach adulthood.

> It's difficult, in Freya's case, to think about the future, because we don't know how she's going to develop. I mean, when she was ten, there was, 'she's never going to learn to read fluently.' And now she can read. (Abigail)

Throughout conversations about development and ability, parents find themselves occupying the difficult position of wanting to show how their child can overcome the odds of their diagnosis (Landsman 1998), whilst also learning to be measured about celebrating breakthroughs. Worry is therefore compounded by the unknown of what a child may actually want, and need, when they reach the adult stages of their lives.

Such discussions surrounding autonomy and dependence necessarily draw upon the emerging field of the anthropology of care, which explores how care, although a universal, is also highly culturally variable. In this context, care is understood as a relationship of dependence and support through which human lives are sustained (McKearney and Amrith 2021: 1). In discussions of parenthood, personhood, the welfare state, and disability, an exploration into who is providing care and how is of key importance. The value of autonomy, and how this is incorporated in the care of people with impaired cognitive function, is an important consideration to be made (Kittay 2010; Pols, Althoff and Bransen 2017; Pols et al. 2017). While dependence is importance, caring relationships necessarily involve the

consideration of personal autonomy too; 'it is not the caregivers' job to avoid hindering people from enacting autonomy but to support them to achieve a good life' (Pols et al. 2017: 781).

It is clear that there is a complex relationship between autonomy and dependence, arising largely from a cultural situation in which such a large value is placed on independence and personal responsibility. In reality, however, as argued by many anthropologists, the idea that people are able to live completely independently of each other is an illusion, largely born out of the dominant narratives of liberalism.

Austerity and the welfare state

The modern welfare state in Britain was established in the period following WWII to address growing inequalities across the country. However, since this post-war boom, there has been a steady decrease in funding of such services, as the UK economy has shifted towards the 'liberal market economy', in which the values of neoliberalism and minimal welfare protection have been implemented (Koch and James 2020).

The far-reaching impact of neoliberal policies internationally has been studied and written about extensively. What is of particular importance here is the impact that such policies have had both politically and socially on those who are unable to conform to the neoliberal ideal of economic and social independence, and therefore depend heavily on state provisions. Welfare reforms since the 1970s have led to the intensification of liberal claims of individual freedom and state restraint, despite increased calls for equality and state moral obligation (Staeheli and Brown 2003).

Further, while in theory, neoliberal ideology promises the rolling back of the state, in reality this has often led to non-governmental and private entities taking on governmental responsibilities. This has led to logic of the market percolating into state activities, so that even those state institutions which have not been privatised, including schools and the police service, must operate within this enterprise framework (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 989). As there is an increased emphasis on self-governance and individual responsibility, anthropologists have repeatedly highlighted how some groups, particularly the poor, are less prepared to do this (Koch 2012; Patrick 2017; Bear 2015; Knight 2015). Such criticisms can then also be extended when considering issues of disability and the welfare state as, again, liberal political theory assumes the subject to be an autonomous individual. Because many disabled people will expect to be supported by the state, financially and socially, the issue of personal responsibility cannot be applied here.

On top of this, social benefits in the UK have faced serious cuts following the implementation of austerity measures since 2010. Austerity was presented to governments as a solution to the financial crisis in 2008. Cuts have subsequently been implemented across the public sector, but in the years following 2010, it has become increasingly clear not only that austerity measures have had devastating effects for the most vulnerable, but also that they have had major adverse economic effects.

Based on a macroeconomic analysis of the three years that followed 2010, influential economist Paul Krugman argued that the implementation of austerity policies was done so on the

basis of flawed economic data. This data was used to justify cuts to public funding based on the advice that debt stalled growth. However, Krugman disputed these claims and demonstrated that, during this three-year period, there was evidence to show that many countries experienced severe economic downturns which were more or less proportional to the austerity measures themselves (Krugman 2013).

Therefore, Krugman argued that global economies have suffered as a direct result of the implementation of austerity policies. Beginning in 2010 in the UK, these cuts hit those who rely on the welfare state the hardest and have fundamentally transformed the state of social care in the country.

It is well documented that austerity and welfare cuts have a disproportionate impact on the disabled community. Since the introduction of austerity measures in 2010, disability advocates have repeatedly highlighted the devastating impacts that they have had on people with disabilities. By 2013, the Centre for Welfare Reform predicted that disabled people would endure 9 times the burden of cuts that the average person would, while those with severe disabilities would be hit up to 19 times harder (Ryan 2020: 3). However, in the past 12 years the situation has continued to worsen, with a 2019 UN report finding that families with disabilities were projected to lose on average more than 30% of their annual net income in the next 2-3 years (Alston 2019: 16).

As such, families who care for disabled children are acutely aware of their inherent vulnerability to cuts to welfare spending. The political rhetoric that emerged throughout the 2010s made it clear to many people dependent on welfare services that not only were their needs not prioritised but, worryingly, that as recipients of state benefits, that they were somehow responsible for their own situation. The image of the 'benefits scrounger' was prevalent in popular media throughout the 2010s, depicting those who relied on the state as lazy and deceptive.

Dependence: realising the importance of the welfare state in your life

> The austerity programme came in, and what was very clear to us was how absolutely dependent we were on the NHS and on public services. (Lucy)

For many parents of disabled children, there is an acute awareness of their dependence on state services. However, given the fact that this dependence is much greater than that of the average person, and the political rhetoric surrounding the provision of financial support to those unable to work, this dependence is often felt as a kind of vulnerability. While in theory the state is supposed to be the 'safety net' for those in need, such as the ill or disabled, in reality many people feel as though the welfare state is not a reliable source of support for them or their families.

> I am very aware – and became aware, really, as soon as he was diagnosed – of our vulnerability. And that's what really worries me, particularly in the in the climate of austerity. (Lucy)

This is a dependence which intersects with so many aspects of the daily lives of parents and their families.

Despite the increased implementation of neoliberal policies, which push towards an ethics of self-governance and personal responsibility, many people in the disabled community will continue to rely on the support of the welfare state. In work such as that of Koch (2012), Patrick (2017) and Bear (2015), anthropological approaches have turned to focus on how people are forced to continue facing the problems of daily life under the conditions of austerity. In her ethnographic work, Patrick compiles accounts of the benefits system to explore lived experiences of the British welfare state. Specifically, she explored how claimants are stigmatised and stereotyped as benefits 'scroungers' (2017).

These notions are especially interesting when considering the place of disabled people. Much of the rhetoric surrounding people who rely on benefits invokes class-based arguments, in which there is an association of being poor with being undisciplined and irresponsible. However, such constructions can be problematised in the case of disability. As highlighted by Murphy (1987), disability discrimination is unique in the fact that it as a social category is so permeable; anyone at any time could become disabled, and by extension so could a close family member or friend. Thus, an ethnographic exploration into the experiences with the state of largely middle-class families with disabled members provides a useful new insight into the workings of the current UK welfare state.

In Koch's ethnography on a British council estate, she observes how mothers turn to a more localised, collective understanding of care and kinship in which larger groups support each other. For many parents of disabled children, the creation of connections with other parents of disabled children has become an essential source of support, as many described parenthood as an experience marked by a sense of loneliness.

> I remember moments really marking that loneliness. I felt marked out all the time as a parent. I had different preoccupations; I couldn't take things for granted. (Karen)

Of the parents who experienced this, most attributed this loneliness to the separation which they see as naturally occurring as their friends raise their own children. The experiences of raising a child with disabilities is so different, and causes such profound changes in a parent's life, that parents described feeling as though they were no longer able to relate to friends' experiences.

> Sometimes they're saying, 'I'm really worried what Hubert's going to do for his GCSEs', and you're thinking, 'I'm really worried my child's never going to feed himself'. And you think, your world is just so different. (Olivia)

> I'm not able to be the friend that they're all being to each other, and all the things they do together, I can't do them. I can't afford them. I don't have time to do them. And they have got very different lives to me now. (Kate)

> It's always been painful, looking at other families going off on trips together, that almost natural exclusion that happens. (Karen)

For those who had access to friendships within the disabled community, sharing experiences with other parents created a vital sense of community. As with the mothers Koch (2012) worked with, these relationships became more than just friendships, but important sources of support and advice. In particular, given the ways in which many parents felt left behind by the system that was supposed to provide for them, being a part of a wider community of parents facing the same issues became crucial for the sharing of advice on how to navigate the complex and opaque system.

Using the framework of survivance, we can begin to analyse the techniques deployed by parents to help each other and resist the label of victimhood. The concept of survivance originates from Native American studies, and it has been used to describe how Native American people used narratives of an active presence to overcome a colonial view of them as mere victims (Vizenor 2008). Applying this framework within the context of this ethnography, we can analyse the use of survivance techniques in the context of the social and economic uncertainties present in the experiences of parenthood. As with the women in Koch's (2012) ethnography, community and support from other parents is of great importance to many parents. This involves the sharing of frustrations, joys, and stories. However, this support goes beyond informal conversation and the sharing of similar stories, to in many cases manifesting in the organisation of peer-run support groups, in which parents of older children guide parents of younger children on navigating the complex state bureaucracy.

> I set up a support group, because I was so cross that these families couldn't fill
> in those forms. (Olivia)

The passing of advice for those who receive it can be crucial in knowing how to access the resources they need. However, it is also a source of empowerment and pride for those who are able to share the knowledge they have gained over the years to help others. For Olivia, setting up her support group was a way of mobilising her skills to help others access resources that may not be obviously available. For many parents, the experience of accessing state-provided services is one marked by a series of barriers formed by a lack of information, a lack of governmental support, and a lack of clarity by the government. The sharing of advice, building of communities, and creation of spaces such as parental support groups are a kind of resistance to this, and thus can be understood as a kind of survivance technique. They provide a means through which parents can not only find an outlet for stresses and uncertainties, but also to resist bureaucratic barriers to restate their active role as agents living under the state. Parents feel as though much of the information they are able to share in these circles is deliberately obscured by government providers, especially with regards to information about claiming resources or financial aid that they are entitled to. As such, through being able to spread the word about techniques that they have themselves used, parents are able to regain some kind of control and power against the force (state bureaucracy) which they feel is not working to help them.

Faith in the future: how austerity impacts the capacity for hope

> You realise slowly over time that these people [working in the local council] absolutely don't care; they almost detest them. It's, 'how little can we get away with spending on your child?'. (Olivia)

> We're finding ourselves reliant on kindness, and kindness has no place in a democracy. You shouldn't have so-called equal citizens who are reliant on kindness in order to have their basic needs met. (Lucy)

The experiences of the participants interviewed, particularly those which are marked by feelings of vulnerability and helplessness, indicate that they have very little faith in the ability of welfare services to provide for their children in the future.

How people spoke about the welfare state was revealing both in terms of the extent to which they had faith in it, but also exactly how austerity policies have impacted this. For those who know that their child will always, in some way or another, rely heavily on state services in their day-to-day lives, austerity is therefore understood, amongst other things, as an attitude. This is then reflected in the actual interactions that parents have with state actors, who they feel are not working to serve their needs, but instead the money-saving, corner-cutting needs of the state.

> They don't do support; they are a barrier, so their job is to not spend money. (Naomi)

As well as in terms of state actors, the state is also spoken about in terms of a system more generally, one which is at its core rigged against the people it is supposed to help. Accessing state services is framed as a kind of fight or battle, in which people are getting support in spite of the system, not because of it.

> It's like one of these gladiator battles: just throw you in and whoever is strongest survives. (Naomi)

> There's the fight for services, because there's such a shortage of it. (Olivia)

These experiences and perceptions have a profound impact on the faith that parents have in the state. At the same time as acknowledging that, under the current circumstances, the future does not feel hopeful for their children, parents also described a lack of confidence that the situation that welfare services are currently in will improve any time soon.

In his 2013 book *The future as a cultural fact*, Appadurai argued for a greater anthropological attention on the role of imagination in social processes and constructions of the future. This call was echoed in Bryant and Knight's 2019 work *The anthropology of the future*, in which they argued that 'our concept of the present *as present* derives from the future; that without a concept of futurity the present ceases to exist as such' (Bryant and Knight 2019: 16).

Implicit in question about the future for parents and their families was that of uncertainty. In anthropological literature, uncertainty has been understood as a fundamental dimension of risk, concerning the future (Boholm 2003: 167). Berthomé et al. argued for an interactionist approach to uncertainty, that saw it arising as the outcome of interactional dynamics (Berthomé et al. 2012). Such a perspective is reflected in Allard's ethnography which explores the role of bureaucratic anxiety in Warao Amerindian interactions with the state. Here, uncertainty was understood to have resulted from the extended and unfamiliar social relations that bureaucratic processes created (Allard 2012).

With more recent developments in the anthropology of time, anthropologists have become increasingly interested in how past experiences and present precarity or uncertainty impact how people are, or are not, able to imagine their futures. For example, in their work with Palestinian women whose husbands were serving life sentences in Israeli prisons, Segal observed how women were caught in an eternal present (Segal 2013). For them, the future exists as a complete abstraction, and therefore cannot be anticipated or imagined. Similarly, Bryant's ethnography exploring experiences of time in Cyprus during the early 2000s, during the ongoing conflict between the north and south, she argued that present crises bring the 'present-ness of the present into the fore', making the future a complete unknown (Bryant 2016). This orientation towards the future, demonstrates how the present can be understood as 'taking on the burden of gathering the past and projecting it into the unknown future' (Bryant 2016: 24).

Of course, in discussing how they are, or are not, able to plan for their futures, the question of hope arises. When faced with a future where a child will be reliant on a service which has already repeatedly failed to meet their basic needs, many parents described a lack of hope in the future.

> I don't think it's going to be great for Ciaran unless something changes in the social care system. (Naomi)

> Obviously, I follow what's going on in the government and stuff. And that gives me very, very, very little hope as to how they are looking at the future of social care and looking at the future of disabled people. (Kate)

Hope is an important dimension of future-building, as it is not just an orientation, but a tool through which realities can become constructed. As argued by Bryant and Knight, hope provides momentum to 'facilitate social change by actualizing potentiality' (Bryant and Knight 2019: 143). The potentials that hope provides for social action is explored ethnographically by Novas (2006), in his examination of the political economy of hope in biomedical research. Here, he found that activism driven by the hope of patients and their families demonstrates that hope is not simply a product of the imagination, but actually can materialise through social practice (Novas 2006: 290).

This analysis reveals the significance of hope for those living in uncertainty. Hope is an important tool which can transform futures and drive change. However, the capacity for hope can be limited in the face of constant failures by government services, and pervading narratives surrounding the cutting back of public services.

As illustrated in Novas' ethnography, collective action and group activism can provide the conditions through which hope can be realised. As with the support groups that many parents reported having attended, finding and participating in action with communities of similar people can provide an essential technique within which hope is not just imagined, but used as a tool to improve futures.

Austerity as disabling

> We're not limited by Ollie's ability or disability. We're limited by the money that's there to do stuff. (Lucy)

In the context of disability, the idea of vulnerability is a key one. However, when parents spoke of vulnerability and worry, the source could never be traced back simply to their child's disability. Instead, their concerns arose from situations of financial instability, and the worry that other people would not provide sufficient care for their child if they were no longer able to. In this context, therefore, it became increasingly clear that disability could not be reduced to a medical, biological, or bodily condition. Instead, disability is a social condition, as argued by Murphy, who described his disability as 'a disease of social relations no less real than the paralysis of the body' (Murphy 1987: 4).

> I believe in him; I believe he has potential. But I don't believe in other circumstances. (Nick)

Further, in the context of austerity, these concerns are heightened. The worry surrounding the social consequences of disability in terms of discrimination and prejudice from peers is compounded by that which materialises in the failures of state services.

> We are completely dependent on other people, and on the systems that will pay those people, find those people, and support those people to be here. That's the biggest worry. I think that's a bigger worry than Ollie's condition. Because the condition is what it is. (Lucy)

These ideas are reflected in Frances Ryan's work on the impact of austerity on the lives of disabled people in Britain. As a journalist living with a disability, Ryan explored how policies and attitudes of austerity Britain have consistently worked to strip disabled people of their basic rights. In her book, she argues that vulnerability is not inherent to the condition of disabled people; isolation, desperation and fear are not inevitable. Instead, vulnerability arises when 'politicians choose to pull the support disabled people need in order to live dignified, fulfilling, independent lives' (Ryan 2020: 9). This is very much reflected in the accounts of parents, whose concerns principally arose from a lack of faith that the welfare state would be there to provide for their child in the future. Whilst McDermott and Varenne (1995) argued for a social model of disability which saw culture as disabling, in the context of the lives of disabled people in the UK, it is also clear that, for many families, austerity is disabling.

Accessing the welfare state: bureaucracy, forms and complexity

Bureaucratic processes have been extensively analysed by scholars in political science, who look at how it functions as a tool of the state. Weber was the first to formally approach bureaucracy as a unit of study in its own right, referring to it as an 'iron cage', and an inevitable outcome of capitalist modernity (Weber 2006). In his view, dehumanisation was an essential outcome of bureaucratisation, a fundamental virtue of capitalism, that erased human emotion from official business (Weber 2006: 51).

Such ideas have increased relevance in contemporary society, in which the inefficiency of government and government services has manifested in a proliferation of form-filling. As it has become more difficult to access public services and money, many have found themselves spending increasing time and effort form filling in order to access, or regain access to, benefits (Koch and James 2020).

These ideas have been explored in more recent ethnographies which have directly addressed the role of bureaucratic processes in contemporary society. For example, in his work in Pakistan, Hull explored article documents through the lens of materiality and agency (Hull 2012). Unlike Weber, who characterised documents as passive, Hull approached them as artefacts of sociality, through which relationships with the state are shaped and interpreted (Hull 2012: 18). Such a framework provides a fascinating insight into how people actually engage with documents and forms.

Complexity: understanding the system

> The biggest challenge was finding out about, and negotiating with, the local authority to meet your needs, and then finding a place that would have him, who can meet his needs. The hardest by far. (Naomi)

When describing interactions with state services, most parents described being confronted by overwhelming complexity. Rather than being presented with information about the kinds of support available to them, and how to access it, parents are left to find this for themselves. From the perspective of parents as claimants, they see this ambiguity as deliberate, as a measure to prevent them from claiming everything that they are entitled to.

> It's knowing what information sources there are and what's out there, and working out how to navigate that. That is actually incredibly complicated; there's all sorts of barbed wire in there…it's very, very complicated. (Karen)

Whilst this complexity therefore has the consequence that some families are simply not able to access resources that should be available to them, it also has huge impacts on the daily lives of those trying to navigate it. For parents who already spend more time than most caring for their child's needs, they must then dedicate another large part of their lives navigating

complicated bureaucratic systems in order to access the support provided through the government. This can have a profound impact on the temporal experience of parenting, as people are unable to put energy into thinking about what the future might look like.

> I definitely do just live day to day. And there is also this element of there being so much to do care-wise in a day that I don't really have space for anything else. And people often say to me, 'just get through the day'. (Kate)

This kind of temporality has been studied anthropologically, with scholarship looking at how precarious social situations can leave people stuck in a kind of constant present. For example, in his ethnography of displacement under new development projects in Vietnam, Harms explored how temporal uncertainty restricts capacity for productivity (Harms 2013). Similarly, when confronted with seemingly endless bureaucratic tasks, compounded with the time it takes to care for a child, planning for and imagining the future can become an increasingly difficult task for parents.

Becoming an administrator: form filling

> Here are these families, they've been told their child is profoundly disabled, and that they'll get some money to cover these additional costs. But to get it, you've got to fill in this form. (Olivia)

Given the complexity of these bureaucratic processes, many parents find themselves occupying the position of administrator as well as a parent. Whilst many parents were happy to spend time caring for their child, and supporting them to live happy lives, many also expressed annoyance at the form-filling that they were required to do. This related not only to the length and complexity of the forms that they are presented with, but also the nature of the questions themselves. Testimonies from disabled people who endure extensive assessments in order to qualify for government support have repeatedly highlighted the unnecessarily complex and degrading nature of such processes. For example, writing in The Guardian about his experiences of the PIP assessment as a disabled man, Rob Crossan described the process as 'intrusive, humiliating, and completely pointless' (Crossan 2017). Similarly, for parents who must complete extensive documentation in order to prove their child's eligibility for government support, they must undergo a difficult, and emotionally challenging, process.

> You read the report, and they are so negative about what they can't do, and what help they need. And when you read the EHCP, it's like, 'is this really about my child?' (Abigail)

> The questions are a bit soul destroying, because in order to get the money, you're told fill it in on your child's worst day. Can your child walk? No. Can your child talk? No. Is your child up in the night several times? Yes. Does your child wet the bed? Can your child interact? Does your child need help going to

the toilet? Can your child brush their teeth? Can they wash themselves? When they're tiny, it's not so bad. But when they get to 10 and you're writing 'my child needs help going to the bathroom', it becomes really soul destroying that you're having to put all this information into a form. (Olivia)

Parents described the contradictory feelings of, on the one hand, wanting to celebrate their child's achievements, but, on the other, having to fixate on all of the things their child is not able to do through the process of form filling. As a result, bureaucratic processes become charged with emotion. Thus, as argued by Hull, bureaucracy should not be understood as neutral, and studied in terms of simply a means of governance. Anthropological enquiry should also focus on how bureaucratic texts are 'produced, used, and experienced through procedures, techniques, aesthetics, ideologies, cooperation, negotiation, and contestation' (Hull 2012: 4). Parents' engagements with bureaucracy impact their experiences of time, as well as their perceptions of the state as an entity which they do not feel has their best interests at heart.

Schools and education

The process of actually choosing the school, and then stating the argument to get her a place, was the hardest thing I've ever done. (Karen)

He's not being provided with what he should be provided with, and nothing is done about it. And nobody actually cares that laws have been broken. (Olivia)

Naomi's son Ciaran, now 11, began his education in mainstream school. Although he initially coped well academically, demonstrating an advanced reading level, as he got further into his primary education, Naomi and her partner realised that he was not coping well in the school environment. As his teachers began to notice too, Ciaran underwent assessments, and was diagnosed with autism and ADHD. Initially, Naomi was happy for him to stay in mainstream school with some additional support, paid for by extra funding that the school was receiving. However, increasingly, she began to hear stories about Ciaran being treated differently at school. First, it was that he was eating his lunch with a support worker away from the rest of the children, because he could not cope with the noise of the lunch hall. Then, Naomi discovered that Ciaran had been moved out of the classroom into the corridor, sat at a desk alone and isolated from his fellow pupils.

Given that the school clearly was unable to meet Ciaran's needs, Naomi decided that she wanted her son to be provided with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP). The EHCP is a comprehensive document, compiled by a team of health, social and educational professionals, which details a young person's needs, and how these should be met. It is only with this document that a child can be placed in a specialised school. However, after being told that there was a long waiting list to get this, Naomi and her partner decided to seek help privately, and managed to get Ciaran his EHCP. However, despite having this paperwork,

Naomi was still told that she did not have evidence to prove to the local council that her son needed to be moved.

> We had to go to court to change school, because Ciaran was put in a mainstream school- in theory; he would never have attended. The EHCP was inadequate, because there is a tendency to water it down, so then they can meet the needs until the child goes in, has a crisis, and then they go to special school. (Naomi)

Reaching breaking point, Naomi and her partner made the decision to use up the last of their savings to take their case to court. What followed was a long process of gathering paperwork from Ciaran's school, as well as paying for independent professionals to assess him. In addition, through reading through paperwork received from her son's school, Naomi realised the extent to which her son was in distress at school.

> A lot of evidence from the school paperwork was really clear that Ciaran was in distress most of the time. (Naomi)

Having gone through this long and expensive process, the judge eventually ruled in Naomi's family's favour, and Ciaran was moved school. However, the process had a huge emotional and financial toll on the family, all in a battle against the state to get their son into a school which would be able to meet his needs.

> The biggest regret, really, is that your child is communicating through behaviour and words that things are not working well for them. But we just believed the professionals who said he was fine. (Naomi)

Unfortunately, Naomi's situation is not a unique one. No doubt much of this resistance to moving children into specialist schools arises from the widespread lack of funding provided to the education sector in general, with an 2018 National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) survey finding that only 2% of institutions reported receiving sufficient extra finding to meet the needs of disabled children (Ryan 2020: 183).

What becomes clear here time and time again is that responsibility is completely placed on the shoulders of parents. These experiences are consistent with recent scholarship exploring the impacts of neoliberal governmentality on the structure of the state, and citizen-state relationships. In their evaluation of the role of the state in shaping community, Ferguson and Gupta argue that 'the logic of the market has been extended to the operation of state functions' (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 989). State services are not structured in a way in which people are given support; they must prove conclusively that they are deserving enough, that their child is 'disabled enough', to qualify for state provisions. In many cases, this involves a child undergoing severe and visible distress before parents are believed.

> It's all illegal, but because everywhere is failing, it's almost like it doesn't matter. (Olivia)

Parents are placed in a unique situation in which those who are breaking the laws are controlled by those who are making them. The example of conflicts with schools is indicative of wider problems associated with navigating state services. Not only are individuals made responsible for accessing state-provided services but, when they fail to provide what they should, they are also responsible for holding local councils to account. Some parents even expressed explicit attitudes of 'picking their battles'; it is simply impossible for parents to fight back every time something goes wrong, or a service is not provided.

Conclusion

Drawing upon existing anthropological literature and interview data, in this article I have argued that uncertainty is consistently present in imaginings of the future for parents of disabled children. This is not only in terms of what a child might want or need, but also of what might be provided for families by the state. I have explored how parents understand the role of the state in their lives, and how this impacts their capacity to have faith in the future. Often, this relationship is understood as one of opposition: parents feel as though they access state support in spite of, not because of, interventions of local state services. As such, following existing anthropological scholarship which demonstrates how culture is disabling (Reid-Cunningham 2009; McDermott and Varenne 1995), I argue that for families of disabled children in the UK, austerity is disabling.

This is not to say, however, that parents are left powerless in the face of this uncertainty. Community action and the sharing of knowledge provides a powerful survivance tool through using which parents are able to assert themselves as active agents within a complex and opaque bureaucratic system. Despite this, the state should not function as a barrier to parents; failures of state services impact the capacity for hope, and hope is not just an object of imagination, but crucial for the materialisation of change.

Given this conclusion, we may ask how anthropology can address these issues. The anthropological focus on personhood brings to the fore the illusory nature of human independence through ethnographically demonstrating the extent to which all humans, everywhere, are dependent on one another. A focus on disability further demonstrates this, and also the quality of human interdependence and capacity for care as something which should not be devalued but celebrated. This could have implications not only in terms of the cultural recognition of dependence as a fact of human existence, but also on how 'welfare dependency' is understood more broadly as a condition of all citizens in the UK. In addition, by listening to the experiences of families of disabled children themselves, the issues that truly matter to them can be understood. Disability is not a medical condition of the 'Other', but a social category which is permeable and culturally constructed.

At the end of every interview, I asked each participant what they were most looking forward to in their future. The answers were strikingly mundane. Nick was looking forward to his son living around the corner from them, visiting at weekends. Kate was looking forward to getting a paid job and finally being able to go on holiday (something she had been unable to do since the birth of her son 12 years ago). Karen was looking forward to, as she put it, 'being

sacked' by her daughter and watching her face the world without her. Abigail was excited about seeing her daughter get a job one day, hopefully at a nail salon. For the parents that I spoke to, hope was for normality, stability and a future which was not limited by their child's disability. As Naomi put it, 'I want a more boring life'. I hope that she and all the others will be able to achieve this.

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THE PHANTASM OF LUCK: A PRECARIAT'S NOTION OF SURVIVANCE IN ISTANBUL

WESAM HASSAN[1]

The article draws upon ethnographic research conducted over 18 months (2021-2022) among people who engage in state-regulated games of chance in Istanbul. I examine how they construe their participation in games of chance to unravel the motivations behind their engagement in economically uncertain activities during times of financial and economic crisis. The article offers a nuanced understanding of the human experience related to involvement in games of chance. Rather than focusing solely on the clinical and moral judgments associated with gambling, it presents how the use of games of chance paradoxically serves as a technique to renew the players' hopes to endure the uncertain social, economic, and political realities they face. I observe that my participants are primarily chasing luck, that would bring wealth, and the fleeting moments of amusement promised by games of chance. I suggest conceptualising their technologies of imagination for envisioning a more favourable future (Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen 2009, Bear 2020) through their pursuit of good fortune and socially embedded play as acts of survivance that defy the annihilation that economic struggles and precarity and continuous work brings and revitalise their presence (Vizenor 2009) to endure instability, precarity, and anxiety of the future.

Keywords: Games of chance, precariat, survivance, luck, Istanbul

At *Eminönü* square[2]

Lotteries and other numerical chance games offer 'larger than life' dreams, in exchange for the small price of the ticket. They make life wider, as wide as your

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dreams and imagination do, so you do not feel suffocated by daily burdens. (Zeynep, research participant. Winter 2021, Istanbul)

In December 2021, I went to *Eminönü* Square in Istanbul to get a lottery ticket from the '*Nimet Abla'* Kiosk, a lottery selling point famous for being the luckiest kiosk to get a ticket from in Turkey. The 2022 New Year's Eve lottery draw was promising a big prize, as is the case every year since the establishment of the Turkish National Lottery in the early 1920s. A few hundred people formed messy queues waiting in front of the kiosk to purchase their tickets. It was less crowded than the previous years when many people who come from all over Turkey, not only Istanbul, would form large queues to purchase a lottery ticket from the famous '*Nimet Abla'*. We were during the COVID-19 pandemic, and people were still wearing masks, many of them dropping the mask to cover their mouths while breathing normally through their noses.[3]

'We are lucky to have come on a relatively less busy day. People are still considering COVID-19 and trying to avoid crowded places', Zeynep, the participant whom I was accompanying, told me. In the 2022 lottery, the grand prize amounted to 120 million Turkish Lira (equivalent to 5,266,200 GBP). The Turkish lottery offers tickets in three ways: quarter, half, or full. It is common for individuals to purchase various quarters to diversify their opportunities. Each quarter ticket is priced at 30 TL (1.32 GBP), while a half ticket costs 60 TL (2.63 GBP), and a winning quarter means winning a quarter of the grand prize. By acquiring multiple quarters, such as the four purchased by Zeynep, lottery participants automatically enhance their likelihood of winning as they participate in different tickets. Zeynep recounted that thinking about the New Year is almost synonymous with the National Lottery; both promise a new start. She said: 'I bought one for me and I will give the other three quarters as gifts to my mother, father, and husband. It is a habit and a New Year custom that I share with many people here which renews our hopes for a new start and better life.'

Zeynep is 35 years old, married with two children, and works as an assistant and apprentice in a hair salon, a temporary job that she had to accept without a work contract and can end abruptly anytime. Since her husband's job is also a temporary one as a construction worker, she started the job in 2018 to help with her household's expenses. She lived and worked in *Maltepe*, a neighbourhood located on the Asian side of Istanbul where I also lived. Zeynep was one of the first people to agree to participate in my research and kindly introduced me to other participants. We agreed to go together to *Eminönü* which is on the European side of Istanbul. Zeynep brought her daughter with us and asked her to choose the five tickets, including mine. Zeynep said: 'I always ask one of my children to choose the tickets, children have pure hearts. They are like lucky charms that attract good luck.'

The distance required almost an hour and a half of transportation to get from *Maltepe* on the Asian side to *Eminönü* on the European side. It is a relatively long distance from where Zeynep lives and works. I told Zeynep that she could have easily got a lottery ticket from mobile lottery sellers or from one of the various kiosks that sell the tickets in her

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[3] During my fieldwork in Istanbul, I observed that many people dropping masks under their noses was a significant phenomenon. This was strange to me because it did not prevent the spread of the virus, but it complied with the state's rule of wearing masks. There have also been campaigns encouraging people to wear masks correctly.

neighbourhood. 'From *Nimet Abla*! I usually buy four-quarter tickets from *Eminönü*'s kiosk. It is the place where you can find good luck', Zeynep said. Zeynep explained that she thinks of the distance and waiting in lines as requisites for getting lucky, saying 'Getting lucky is not that easy. To find your luck, you need to make some effort to obtain it.'

Figure 1 – The author's quarter lottery ticket for 2022 that she got with Zeynep.

Neither Zeynep nor I won any prize. However, the question remains: What attracts people to play a game of chance? Why do Zeynep, and many others, carry on purchasing a lottery ticket, knowing the slight chance of winning a big prize? Since antiquity, luck has been depicted and utilised to refer to the random and unequal distribution of fortune between people. Luck is a popular notion in mythologies and common knowledge, yet its depiction differs from one context to another. Fortuna, the goddess of Luck and fate during Roman times, was depicted as a blind woman who would randomly disseminate fortune between people. While in Turkey, luck comes with the bird of luck – *Talih Kuşu* – who chooses where to land. The people would say that, 'the bird of luck has landed on your head' – *Talih KuŞu baŞina Kondu* – to refer to winning the jackpot or being lucky at certain life ventures. Games of chance beguile people to participate in them, hoping to turn the wheel of their fortune and secure financial wealth. Whether it is a belief in luck or one's skills, chasing the phantasm of luck is an important motive for playing a game of chance.

Analysing my participants' experiences related to their involvement in games of chance can serve as a lens through which we can discern the cultural, social, and personal factors influencing their participation in specific economic activities (Sahlins 1974). Indeed, humans are not solely economic actors but are deeply intertwined with their social systems (Polanyi 1977). This holds relevance in the Turkish context, where people who are participating in lotteries are intricately connected within their collective social networks (Granovetter 1985). For example, like Zeynep, they share the tradition of gifting lottery tickets to family and close friends during the New Year's draws (Hassan 2023).

The way people perceive luck and play has been commodified into profit-making ventures within the realms of the gaming and commercial gambling industries (Malaby 1999, 2003; Scott 2003; Schüll 2012; Pickles 2019; Cassidy 2020). I perceive these industries as extractive economies that exacerbate inequality, prey on people's dreams, and exploit them.

Nevertheless, this article's primary objective is to delve into my participants' narratives to understand the motivations and reasons behind their choice to engage in games of chance, even when the chances of winning are exceptionally low, particularly during periods of heightened uncertainty. The concept of survivance, introduced by Vizenor in the context of theorising the narratives of the struggles, living through traumatic events, and resistance of Native American people (Vizenor 1994, 2009), aptly characterises my participants' 'technologies of imagination' (Sneath, Holbraad, and Pedersen 2009) in their pursuit of good fortune and their participation in games of chance. I suggest that the active agency of my participants as seen in their utilisation of their imaginative narratives about winning the jackpot along with finding enjoyment in the fleeting and ludic experience of engagement with games of chance, represent forms of their survivance. This survivance is exhibited in the renewal of their hopes and dreams of easy wealth, utilising their pursuit of luck, that allows them to endure life and to 'resist the annihilation' (Vizenor 2009) and hopelessness of our contemporary neoliberal sensorium.[4]

The semantics of survivance acknowledge the fact of the living and of life itself (Fassin 2010). The concept recognises people's persistence, resilience, and presence despite the oppression, crisis, and violence that deplete them (Vizenor 1994, 2009). I see survivance as an ongoing process that remains elusive and does not guarantee absolute security or safety. Therefore, an analytic of survivance encompasses the dichotomous interplay between precarity and reliability, suffering and enduring, and surviving and thriving, allowing for a vision of life that extends beyond docility, passivity, and victimisation (Povinelli 2021). I argue that the analytic of survivance aids in the interpretation of the employment of play (Malaby 2009) and pursuing luck as a means of coping with life, and redeeming the time invested in labour, anxiety about the future, and the overwhelming realities of subjugation (Hammering 2022). Additionally, I suggest that the notion of survivance allows for an understanding of engagement with games of chance that goes beyond the clinical point of view, which focuses only on the brain model of gambling addiction with its clinical predictability and moral judgments. Instead, survivance as an analytic shows how the consumption of games of chance makes sense to my participants, and speaks to their techniques of enduring uncertain social, economic, and political realities through the imagination of wealth beyond ceaseless labour, as well as viewing life as a whole as a gamble itself (Malaby 2003). The article thus provides an understanding of the games of chance industry in Turkey that goes beyond, yet still accounts for, moralising criticisms of its social and individual harms and of extractive gaming and gambling economies more generally.

The anthropologist Klaus Hammering provides an excellent example of ways in which construction workers in *Sana'yi* neighbourhood in Japan redefine their relations with their masculinity and 'being a man' through paying their gambling debts. Hammering argues that their betting habits during the weekends compensate for the time they spend at work and redeem it (Hammering 2022). Being indebted and claiming the dignity to repay it, Hammering argues, contributes to the imaginary of being a man in the context of his research (Hammering

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[4] I employ the term 'sensorium' to underscore the significance of how individuals perceive, engage with, and interpret neoliberal structures. It emphasises the experiential and interpretative aspects of our engagement with these structures.

2022). Gambling habits, although perceived as 'negative excess', can be considered acts of resistance against capitalist times in which workers perform dangerous physical labour (Hammering 2022). Despite their being indebted from betting, Hammering argues that their debt repayment shapes and configures their understanding of what being a man is, emphasising the dignity of debt repayment (Hammerings 2022). This sentiment extends beyond the pathological aspects of gambling and the moralistic lens that views people engaged in betting or games of chance as reckless, irrational, and lacking the ability to practice self-control.

The recent economic crisis in Turkey, which began in 2018, and the pre-election debates leading up to the 2023 Turkish presidential election, have exacerbated socio-political tensions and financial hardships for the Turkish people (Yücel and Kabalay 2022). I start the article by situating the ethnography within the current Turkish economic struggles to draw a bigger picture of the context to which my participants relate. I present their narratives of engagement with numerical chance games to examine how the imagination of luck and the desire for an 'egalitarian luck' was augmented through Turkish cinema and the advertising campaigns of the state-regulated games of chance industry. Specifically, I focus on their participation in the national lottery and numerical chance games, such as scratch cards and numerical lotto, during times of socio-political and economic uncertainty.

Uncertain times and games of chance

My fieldwork took place amidst a global pandemic and the economic turmoil in Turkey in 2021-2022. During this period, inflation soared to more than 80 percent, and the Turkish national currency depreciated by 44 percent against the US dollar (Güngen et al. 2021). The devaluation of the national currency resulted in a shortfall in the monthly income of individuals receiving their salaries in Turkish lira, exacerbating their financial hardships. Turkish political scientists Yücel and Kabalay have highlighted the political and economic nature of the increasing number of suicides related to economic issues in Turkey since 2018. They argue that these tragic suicides are deeply intertwined with the consequences of the neoliberal transformation in Turkey since the 1980s, as well as the policy decisions made by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) government (Yücel and Kabalay 2022). According to their analysis, the marginalisation of the working class, the erosion of their political and economic influence, and the impacts of heightened financial speculation and financialisation have left people in a state of precarity and indebtedness (Yücel and Kabalay 2022). Furthermore, the uncertain political and economic climate in Turkey leading up to the 2023 presidential elections, coupled with the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has given rise to an increase in speculative economic activities. These include currency trading and the emergence of the cryptocurrency market in Turkey (Saka 2020). Mert, one of my participants who I will introduce in the coming pages, told me that,

> Everything is more expensive now. The Turkish Lira is losing its value. The inflation contributed to the increase in the prices of food. We try to buy and store groceries for the coming months because the prices change every day.

> There is no proper insurance in the *lokanta* [local restaurant] where I am working now. It can suddenly get closed anytime like the case with many shops in Istanbul.
>   (Istanbul, Winter 2021)

However, attributing the economic crisis solely to economic indicators such as the inflation rate and currency crash would overlook the social and political influence on economic policies and reform plans (Gür et al. 2019). A political economic analysis of the current crisis would attribute the current economic uncertainty to political causes that started with the attempted coup d'état in 2016 (Gür et al 2019; Yücel and Kabalay 2022). Subsequently, the increased economic uncertainty has encouraged misleading speculation from investors in the Turkish financial market which exacerbated the economic crisis (Gür et al 2019; Yücel and Kabalay 2022). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has furthered the economic and financial struggles of the people leading to the loss of 2.6 million jobs (Baez and Demirguc-Kunt 2021). The impact of COVID-19 has also led to increased vulnerabilities due to economic insecurity and precarious working conditions, leading to a disproportional impact on the impoverished and the marginalised (Baez and Demirguc-Kunt 2021). Women and informal workers were at the forefront of this economic vulnerability, since female workers were three times more likely to become unemployed during the COVID-19 pandemic as they work in jobs affected by the lockdown measures, such as tourism, food, and hospitality (Baez and Demirguc- Kunt 2021). In a survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), more than seven out of ten respondents from Turkey expressed concerns about not being able to earn enough money to survive (OECD report 2021).

Moreover, Turkey stands out for its notably long working hours, ranking among the highest among the OECD countries (Mercan 2020). This extended work schedule has various consequences, including health issues such as obesity (Mercan 2020) and a tendency to engage in activities that appear to compensate for the time dedicated to work, such as gambling and drinking. Therefore, I argue that involvement in games of chance within such a context can be seen as a means of survivance, a technique for reclaiming the time consumed by long work hours (Hammering 2022). Additionally, it serves as a response to heightened precarity, prompting people to harness their imaginative capacities in speculative and absorbing pursuits like betting and games of chance, as a way to cope with the challenges of their precarious living and employment situations.

Games of chance industries thrive through the state's support because of the windfall tax revenues they contribute to the national economy (Cassidy 2020). Turkey is no exception. The country has a well-established and state-regulated game of chance industry. For instance, in 1926, three years after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the National Lottery was launched to support the Turkish National Pilots' Association and was called *Tayyare Piyangosu* (Airplane lottery). Nationalist sentiments were closely tied to participation in the National Lottery to support the newly Turkish modern state and its pilots' association. Nimet Abla was the name of the first woman who popularised the National Lottery ticket and increased the sales and demand for the Turkish lottery during those times and afterwards, and her kiosk

became the popular trademark for selling the lotteries.[5] In 1939, the national lottery administration was established, and the *Tayyare Piyangosu* was renamed the *Milli Piyango*, or 'National Lottery' (Tunçay 1993; Yaşar 2010; Uğur 2015). It remains lucrative and contributes to the national economy, channelling taxes to national projects, particularly the Turkey Wealth Fund, which was established in 2016 and managed directly by the country's president (MilliPiyango Report 2021).

Although gambling and games of chance may have the same logic, interestingly, however, my research participants treat games of chance and gambling differently. They describe gambling as only related to casino life, including card games such as poker and roulette. However, state-regulated games of chance such as the lottery, numerical chance games, betting on sports, and horse racing are 'games' that offer prizes as acts of play, not of a gamble. For them, games of chance were regarded as means of finding their luck. They also regarded the games as affordable entertainment activities that enhance socialisation and recuperation with family and friends. Gaming prioritises play and entertainment (Malaby 2009), unlike the stigmatised medium of *gambling* which often indicates wasting money, being irresponsible, and recklessness. My participants also associated gambling with being rich or with people who are part of a class of business professionals and the upper middle class, who are secure in terms of affluence or wealth.

The Turkish state regulation of the industry has contributed to their perceptions, as Turkish law has distinguished gambling from games of chance and framed games of chance as legitimate and legal while gambling as illegal (Yaşar 2010). Turkish legislation defines the legal, state-regulated 'games of chance' (*Şans Oyunları*) as 'games played for a cash prize such as lotteries, numeric games, and instant win games'. On the other hand, 'gambling' (*Kumar*) is defined as 'games played for a gain where profit or loss depends on chance' (Yaşar 2010; Uğur 2015). Despite the legitimation of the industry by the state and its popularity among the people, it is a contested topic that triggers debates about religion and politics leading to polarised opinions, especially after the privatisation of the National Lottery Institution. Additionally, in 2020, during the COVID-19 lockdown, the Turkish National Lottery administration launched a phone application, which makes the engagement with numerical games of chance convenient anywhere and anytime for those who are over 18 (MilliPiy Report 2021; Hassan 2023).

Participation in numerical games of chance invokes both secular and religious sentiments among the people, who debate the permissibility of games of chance. In one of our conversations, Zeynep said:

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[5] *Nimet Abla* serves as an iconic symbol for acquiring lottery tickets in Turkey. Obtaining tickets from the renowned *Nimet Abla* Kiosk holds great significance, almost as a ritualistic tradition, especially during the New Year. People firmly believe that her kiosk dispenses elusive lucky tickets. However, I purchased numerous tickets and none has proven fortunate. *Nimet Abla*, originally known as Melek Nimet Özden and born in Istanbul in 1899, is a historical figure who ventured into the world of ticket sales, starting with lottery tickets from the Turkish Aircraft Association. Operating from a strategic location in front of the *Eminönü Yeni* Mosque, her shop served as a tobacconist, lottery, and money exchange place. Nimet Abla faced scepticism about a woman succeeding in this profession and managing challenges, such as collecting payments for sold tickets. Despite doubts and refusals from some suppliers, *Nimet Abla's* success story and the winning tickets from her kiosk made her reputation grow and continue till now. See https://www.nimetabla.com/

> I heard that playing the lotteries is considered a sin in Islam.[6] But I still buy my New Year lottery ticket. I pray, fast Ramadan, and consider myself a practicing good Muslim. But I always get a ticket for the New Year or try the numerical lottery [*sayisal lotto*]. My grandmother was religious, but she would always get *sayisal lotto* on weekly basis. She would always say that luck is waiting for us to find it. Who knows, maybe I will win one day or maybe I buy out of habit. I also remember my dear grandmother, who passed away, every time I purchase the lottery. I have to try the game to get my luck. Otherwise, I will be hoping to be lucky without actively taking part in it. I can see the increase in advertising billboards about new types of lotteries and this makes me curious to try them.
> (Istanbul, summer 2022)

Zeynep points out that the influence of her 'habit' of buying lottery tickets, remembering her grandmother, as well as her efforts to find her luck, counter her doubts about the religious permissibility of games of chance. Another lottery participant, Dicle, recounted:

> I think it is all a show pretending that they are a pious government. They, the government, compete to be more religious than previous ones, but they do not care about religion. It is all a façade. Their religion is money. They use whatever they can to extract money from the people to participate. The government wants all of us to play games of chance. Since 2020, we have a new official phone application for the National Lottery Institution which made it much easier and more accessible to participate in different numerical chance games.
> (Istanbul, Winter 2021)

The National Lottery (*Milli Piyango*), numerical chance games (*Sayisal Oyunlar),* and instant win scratch cards (*Hemen Kazan*) are regulated by the National Lottery Administration which falls under the Ministry of Finance. The administration was privatised in 2019-2020 and is currently operated by the private company *Demirören* Group Holding, the same corporation which owns most of the media and entertainment channels in Turkey.[7] This turned lottery participation into a political topic, questioning the relations between the government officials and the private company managing the lottery.[8] Privatisation has amplified the mistrust in the state and many people called for the removal of the word 'national' (*Milli*) from the state lotteries because people are questioning the transparency of the lotteries, the possibility of corruption, and doubting the utilisation of its revenues in charity work[9] (Hassan 2023).

Turkey has witnessed multiple economic crises that led to hyperinflation in the early 2000s and shaped its social, cultural, and political changes over the past three decades (Kamp

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[6] Islam opposes 'easy gains' that are obtained without making an effort. Gambling is forbidden in Islam, because it constitutes access to 'easy wealth' that does not come from hard work. One word for gambling is *maysir*, 'made easy', which comes from the Arabic root *yosr*, or 'easiness'. Islam has identified *maysir* ('easy gain', i.e. without labour) as forbidden or satanic (Quran 5:90-91). Islamic principles also posit that in gambling, usually the winner takes money that was destined for another person.

[7] See https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2019/08/29/milli-piyango-resmen-demirorende, 'The National Lottery officially belongs to Demiroren.'

[8] See https://www.diken.com.tr/milli-piyangoda-bilet-satisi-dibe-vurdu-demirorene-guven-yok/, 'Lottery sales are decreasing because there is no trust in Demiroren.'

[9] See https://www.birgun.net/haber/milli-piyango-bayileri-odasi-baskani-ozellestirildikten-sonra-yasanan-guvensizlik-satislari-dusurdu-371123-, 'There is a state of mistrust since the privatization of the lottery.'

et al 2014). Süleyman Özcan and Sezgin Açıkalın, two Turkish economists, examined the relationship between the misery index, linked to low income, and lottery games in Turkey over the period between 2005 and 2013. They showed that people's engagement with lottery games increases at times of financial hardships, because people are relying on luck and hopes of winning the jackpot during times of economic uncertainty and high inflation (Özcan and Açıkalın 2015). Therefore, games of chance industry flourishes during times of recession and economic uncertainty (Cassidy 2020) which gives us a cause to consider how hopes and imaginaries of luck thrive during states of precarity to a point that defies the pragmatics of savings and thrift at times of economic crisis (Hassan 2023).

The lottery and the precariat

> It was probable that there were some millions of proles for whom the Lottery was the principal if not the only reason for remaining alive. It was their delight, their folly, their anodyne, their intellectual stimulant.
> (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*).

In his dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, George Orwell predicted a future in which both authoritarianism and totalitarianism have controlled and homogenised society and the dissemination of the truth. Orwell wrote about the lottery of the proletariats, who waited for its promised prizes weekly. The effects of lottery consumption and the correlation between participation in the lotteries and the socio-economic background of the people engaging with it have been subject to scholarly work and literary fiction, concluding that there is an inverse relation between lottery participation and socio-economic conditions (Beckert and Lutter 2013).

Guy Standing introduced the concept of the 'precariat' as a transition from the traditional proletariat, arguing that it better encapsulates the changes in contemporary social stratification (Standing 2011:12). This term combines 'precarious' and 'proletariat' to signify the unstable and exploitative nature of modern life, work, and the pursuit of stable income (Standing 2011). The proletariat, once a class and society marked by social and intellectual struggles and achievements, has largely become dependent on precarious employment conditions. Anthropologist Anna Tsing contends that precarity has become a widespread condition in our modern era (Tsing 2015: 2). She characterizes precarity as 'life without the promise of stability', a state marked by the uncertainty of existence and the experience of living through various crises (Tsing 2015: 2). However, Tsing's work explores the resilience of Matsutake mushrooms, which were the first living organisms to emerge after the blast in Hiroshima (Tsing 2015: 3). This serves as a contemplative reminder to observe how life can break apart and mend amidst the ruins of capitalism and its destructive modes of production (Tsing 2015: 3).

The distinction between precariousness and precarity, which Judith Butler (2009) has also addressed, acknowledges that precariousness is an existential condition for all people. Social relations and solidarity can ameliorate this state of precariousness in different situations (Butler 2009). However, precarity as a condition further highlights the structural disparities,

such as class, gender, and educational background, of the state of human precariousness and that renders impoverished and marginalised people more vulnerable than others (Butler 2006, 2009). In Butler's words, 'precarity is a politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (Butler 2009:25). My research participants, in this article, are considered less fortunate than others. They are workers who do not have a stable source of monthly income and rely on their manual labour to maintain a daily living. They did not complete their education and their livelihoods, whether as flexible or scheduled labour, depend on working for long hours daily. They work in various unstable jobs: as an apprentice in a hair salon, a worker in a small restaurant (*Lokanta*), a seasonal waste picker, a junior clerk in an advertising company, and a temporary construction worker who works on heritage restoration sites in Istanbul. The flexibility of their working conditions gives my participants a sense of freedom that was simultaneously synonymous with instability and financial insecurity. Their conscious musing on 'luck' that will come one day, and its renewal every New Year with the big lottery draw, keep them enlivened by wishful thoughts of a better future.

The Turkish lottery institution has played a significant role in fostering the idea of luck and invoking the politics of hope associated with participation in games of chance which, I argue, plays a role in counteracting the influence of precarity on the people. The slogan *'Herkesin Şansı'*, or 'luck is for everyone', was actively promoted in various lottery games administered by *MilliPiyango*, the National Lottery Institution in Turkey. This phrase underscored the notion that everyone possesses the potential for luck, attainable through the purchase of different numerical chance games. As part of the marketing campaign, it was proclaimed that 'Everyone's luck' can be found at the National Lottery dealers situated in all 81 provinces of Turkey. The use of the words 'everyone' and 'luck' in this slogan mobilises the concept of hope for a form of egalitarian luck, one that is equally accessible to those who seek it. I propose that this phrase resonates with the contemporary Turkish context, where ideals of justice and equitable resource distribution are promoted as part of the state's propaganda within a populist political discourse rooted in political Islam. This aligns with the populist Islamic rhetoric of the Justice and Development Party (JDP-AKP), which is the longest-serving Islamic party in Turkish history, holding power since 2001 (Kirdiş 2021). The party's approach combines a 'thin theological base' with a 'majoritarian interpretation of Islam' and employs a 'Muslim unity rhetoric' (Kirdiş 2021:2). Within this framework, even activities like games of chance, typically considered forbidden in other Muslim-majority countries, are adapted by the state to create the appearance of luck being made seemingly and paradoxically equitable.

Figure 2 – Stills from a MilliPiyango (MP) advertisement on its channel on YouTube[10]

Ya çıkarsa! – **What if I win?**

I first met Mert next to the Kiosk selling lottery tickets and chance games in *Kadıköy*. He arrived after he finished his shift at a *Lokanta* – one of the neighbourhood's restaurants. I got his contact from the father of my friend, who used to meet Mert in the coffee shops to play board games.[11] Usually, the one who loses the game would pay for the drinks. Mert is 50 years old, has three children and a wife, living in *Sancaktepe*.[12] Mert used to be a truck driver, like my friend's father, before they both retired from the tiring job. Mert purchased ten five-lira scratch cards from the kiosk, costing him 50 Turkish Lira (2.2 GBP) in total.[13] There are different types of scratch cards, but he picked the cheaper ones. However, the cards still promise big prizes, such as 200,000 TL (21,468.53 GBP). These scratch cards are called *Altin Kazı Kazan* – the golden scratch-off. Mert said:

> These cards are my favourite game of chance. I do not need to wait to know if I won or not like the lottery. The exciting moments are between buying the scratch cards and sitting or standing in front of the kiosk to scratch the icons on the card to reveal the prizes. My heart beats a bit faster the same way it used to be when I was younger. I think about this moment when I'm bored at work. I work in a *Lokanta* nearby and I pass by this kiosk on my way to ride the bus home. Being the person who handles the customers and makes the dishes to be served is tiring. It is less tiring than my previous job as a truck driver, but it is also a boring job that lacks any excitement. Sometimes, I get the scratch card during my lunch break, or when I'm buying cigarettes from the kiosk.

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[10] This is part of a new marketing campaign that started in 2020. The mascot of *Milli Piyango,* the National Lottery, has been always the symbol of *Talih Kuşu* - the Bird of Luck. The Lottery's motto is, 'Everybody's luck', *Herkesin Şansi*. The third image depicts the new phone application of MP that was launched in 2020.

[11] Board games like *Okey* and backgammon are popular in Turkey, and people wager money on them to increase the fun, which is considered an illegal form of gambling.

[12] A neighbourhood that was established on the periphery of Istanbul and recognised as a district in 2009, where squatter houses, as well as gated communities, exist.

[13] Due to inflation and changes in exchange rates, the prices change frequently. The multiple interviews with Mert were conducted from the winter of 2021 to the summer of 2022. All exchanges from Turkish Lira to GBP are made according to January 2023 rates of exchange.

Mert started scratching off the cards in complete focus. He is fast yet careful not to erase the numbers under the icons of gold drawn on the scratch card. After he finished, he won 10 TL, and he decided to buy two extra scratch cards with them after our conversation, and said:

> It is easy to play. For example: if you scratch the 6 golden icons on the card and got one 10 TL under one icon in the first line, and two 10 TL under two icons in the second line, you will win 10 TL. Also, if you got a fourth 10 TL underneath the bonus icon on the side, it will be added to your win, and you get 20 TL in total. You have almost 7 icons to scratch and find the prize underneath, which gives you a big chance of winning something. Sometimes if I win 20 TL, I will buy an extra four scratch cards with the money I won. Sometimes I win 40 TL, and I get a pack of cigarettes with the money I won. I do not have an average expenditure on scratch cards. Some days, I spend more than around 150 TL (6.44 GBP) on scratch cards, other days I rarely buy any. I guess it depends on my mood and my workload that day.

In another conversation with Mert, he told me that he hesitates sometimes before getting the scratch cards, indicating that it is not an impulsive action that he pursues mindlessly. However, when he thinks that he could get lucky, or at least excited that he could win, he purchases the cards. He also thinks that the play element in games of chance compensates for the boredom of labour. Mert said:

> Do you think I don't know that I should have spent that money on something better? Like getting chicken or groceries? I know, but I keep telling myself, *Ya çıkarsa?*! (What if I win!), and I buy more scratch cards. Without this hope and the excitement of the possible win, my life would be flavourless.

'What if I win?!', *Ya Çıkarsa?*!,[14] is an idiom that was always used by my research participants when I asked them why they keep on purchasing numerical chance games including lotteries. Its popularity can be traced back to Turkish movies from the 1970s and 80s that depicted stories of lottery wins, serving as motivation to pursue the elusive notion of luck. This idiom featured prominently in these films and was also heavily used in advertising campaigns by the National Lottery Administration in Turkey. According to my research participants, this idiom wields a powerful influence over people when it comes to engaging in games of chance. It serves to dispel doubts and hesitation when making the decision to buy a ticket or participate in such games. This phrase's ubiquity, as an emic term utilised by both the public and lottery vendors, has been disseminated through various media outlets and films, to the point where it has become nearly synonymous with participating in numerical games and purchasing lottery tickets. The phrase not only encourages people to participate in numerical chance games but also carries a significant sense of hope that often overrides rational considerations regarding the odds of winning a lottery ticket or numerical game.

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[14] Pronounced as *yaa-tshee-karsa'?!*

The Turkish cinema of this period, known as *Yeşilçam*,[15] promoted stories of getting rich overnight. They depicted the civil servant or the precarious worker getting lucky and hitting the jackpot after buying a lottery ticket by coincidence. Movies such as *Talih kusu* ('The bird of luck'),[16] and *Milyoner* ('Millionaire') presented the train station worker, the civil servant, and the factory worker who won lottery tickets the first time they purchased a ticket, as having beginners' luck, whilst the people who regularly purchase lottery tickets have failed to do so. Hence, the winners start getting paranoid and mistreating their friends and family to protect their winning tickets from theft. At the end of the movie, the winners choose not to have their lottery money and choose to stay poor instead, promoting the message that wealth would make people lose the warmth and honesty of their families and their loved ones. Also, it responded to the belief that lottery money is not blessed, which means that an accident will happen to the winner after winning the jackpot. In another movie, *Korkusuz Korkak* ('Fearless coward'),[17] the civil servant is also convinced to give a second thought to purchasing a lottery ticket when the lottery seller tells him, *Ya çıkarsa?!* These movies have inspired some of my participants who buy lottery tickets and numerical games and were regularly referenced by many of them.

Figure 3 – A still from the movie *Talih kusu*, when the lottery seller is saying *Ya çıkarsa?!*

Mert distinguishes between playing and gambling when it comes to scratch cards and lotto. He emphasizes that these are games, not gambling activities, mainly because they cost him considerably less than what he would spend in a casino. With a chuckle, Mert adds, 'I need to

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[15] 'Green Pine.' Named after *Yeşilçam* Street in the *Beyoğlu* district of Istanbul, which served as a hub for numerous actors, directors, crew members, and studios.
[16] See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0253782/
[17] See https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0252611/

take some steps towards my luck, and that's by buying scratch cards and numerical lotto. The only way I can think of finding my luck is by consistently spending small amounts until I can locate it... but so far, luck hasn't been on my side.' Despite not winning large sums of money or any significant prizes from scratch cards, he approaches them with a hopeful attitude. Every time he engages with scratch cards, he offers a silent prayer, hoping that one day he will strike it lucky. If that day comes, he envisions using the prize money to purchase a flat or a car. 'I cannot get rich through my work. This is the only way I can dream of being rich one day', he continued.

Mert tried sports betting (known as *Iddaa* in Turkish) in the past, but it resulted in substantial financial losses. He acknowledges that scratch cards and numerical lotto games don't require skill; they are purely games of chance dependent on luck. However, Mert has a strategy, a method he believes increases his chances of winning. He buys scratch cards or numerical lotto tickets in bulk, convinced that his odds improve with increased purchases. He diligently observes the sequence of numbers and searches for patterns among the lucky numbers in the lotto. To aid in his analysis, he takes pictures of both winning and losing lotto cards, allowing him to study the number patterns closely. These efforts that Mert exerts in understanding the patterns of winning numbers indicate the thoughtful approach that he follows in his pursuit of luck. Mert does not think of purchasing scratch cards as a hobby, especially when compared to betting on sports or horses, which might show some form of attachment to the sport. Yet, his interest lies in uncovering the patterns within numbers, with the acknowledgment that luck still plays a crucial role in determining his chances of winning. Similar to Zeynep, Mert also has preferred kiosks from which he buys these games because he believes that certain locations are luckier. Indeed, while media influence plays a role in the experiences of my participants, they are driven by more profound and affective motivations, primarily centered on their relentless pursuit of luck in every encounter with games of chance.

The phantasm of luck and survivance

Luck has frequently been associated with concepts of chance and the future (Rescher 1995). This concept encompasses various dimensions, including theological, moral, and economic, with the latter termed 'cosmo-economics' (Da Col 2012). These dimensions relate to ideas of fate, effortless wealth, and undeserved success. Additionally, luck has a social dimension that manifests in social relationships, rituals, and its perception and circulation within different societies (Da Col 2012). Anthropologists Hamayon (2020) and Da Col (2012) stress the importance of studying luck from an anthropological perspective to understand how it varies across different cultures. They note that luck has both material and immaterial functions. While immaterially subject to diverse interpretations and perceptions (Da Col 2012: 4), the material functions of luck are evident in industries and economies that convert social and individual imaginings of luck into monetary profits (Da Col 2012). Luck is deeply ingrained in daily social life and intertwined with human interaction and imagination (Graeber and Da Col 2011; Daniels 2012). It is closely linked to temporality, functioning as an 'omnipotent concept event' that extends beyond the present, allowing people to discuss and imagine the future in

their current moment (Graeber and Da Col 2011). Luck is often characterised by its unpredictable and uncontrollable nature, transcending the conventional principles of 'cause and effect' (Da Col 2012:2).

The National Lotteries and New Year's Eve hold great importance in Turkey, as symbols of fresh starts. During New Year's celebrations, many people purchase lottery tickets as gifts for their friends and family. By providing a lottery ticket, one individual can share the good fortune of others. This custom is based on the idea that luck is a shared resource that can be distributed among people or that individuals can take part in each other's luck. This belief is demonstrated in idioms and rituals, where successful people are touched in the hope of obtaining a portion of their luck. Mert expressed this idea:

> In Turkey, some people believe that luck can be passed on from the lucky ones to others. For example, some students would say to a successful student: 'I will touch you to give me your luck to get good grades as well.' That is why I believe that some kiosks and sellers are more fortunate than others because they have either been fortunate with previous winning numbers or lucky people frequently.

In Turkish culture, fate plays a central role and is closely linked to the notions of luck and fortune (Dole, 2012). When my participants experienced a loss in numerical chance games, they commonly attributed it to their fate at that moment. Conversely, when they win, they attribute it to being part of their predestined life paths. The phrases 'Luck is for everyone' and 'What if I win?!' contribute to the collective understanding of fate and luck as predetermined and predetermined (*Yazılmış* in Turkish). According to anthropologist Christopher Dole, who studied healing practices in Turkey, the concept of fate always holds significance, as people acknowledge the influence of external factors and predestined life paths, particularly because Turkish secularism failed to address the spiritual needs of the population (Dole, 2012). Dole highlights the binary opposition between the modernisation that Turkey aspires to and the traditional values it inherited from its Ottoman past (Dole, 2012: 22). While the state imposed secular ideals in public and private life, people often turned to rituals and religious beliefs either within or outside the secular discourse (Dole, 2012). This helps explain the strong connection between luck, divinatory practices, and fate, as my participants attribute good fortune, misfortune, or future life events to what is 'written' in their destiny.

Furthermore, the term *'Kismet'* frequently appears in conversations about luck and destiny. It is a Turkish word that refers to fate or destiny and is also used to refer to luck in various life endeavours, whether it is achieving success in a career or encountering an unfortunate event. This is because belief in luck carries a spiritual dimension as it resides in the realm of potential. The games of chance industry capitalises on this realm of aspiration, hope, and imagination, which includes notions of luck. Although many of my participants indicated that they lack trust in the systems that produce games of chance, the industry's revenue shows a continued pursuit of luck. Anthropologist Keith Hart compared wagering money on the unknown to Emile Durkheim's theory of religious rituals, which connects the known (in this case, the game of chance) to the unknown, such as the game's outcome and the concept of luck. Hart argued that money represents the ultimate unknown in modern life,

and people seek to establish a connection with it through gambling (Hart 2020). I observed this in people's participation in games of chance. Additionally, for Turkish people betting and games of chance are considered forms of engagement with society, such as giving lotteries as New Year gifts or gathering to bet on horses and sports in betting salons.

I therefore argue that luck possesses 'phantasmic' characteristics that make it intangible and mythologised, yet consistently present and rationalised in the minds and pursuits of my participants. The concept of phantasm, as referred to by Derrida, refers to an immaterial imagined presence through which the real and imagined are intertwined (Royle 2010). Derrida has pointed out that a phantasm can refer to misleading representations that can distort reality and its meaning (Royle 2010; Saghafi 2015). Derrida has argued that the concept of phantasm and survivance should be studied in relation to each other (Saghafi 2015), particularly when thinking about the phantasm of death and mortality, including Derrida's own. A phantasm is always present in people's lives, especially through its absence, and is reproduced through language, symbols, idioms, and signs (Royle, 2010; Derrida 2011). Derrida reflected on the phantasm of death that haunts the living and can be conjured through tracing its presence in people's lives. I argue that the phantasm of luck, which is present in the lives of my participants, is fuelled by hope as much as Derrida's phantasm of death is maintained by living. The phantasm of luck in the Turkish context is shaped by symbols such as the bird of luck, the idioms that have been discussed earlier, and the public and media discourses that present the possibility of winning a jackpot, promising a better future that is yet to come. Luck, although absent from the lives of the precariat participants discussed in this article, is present as an imagined possibility and destination, an absent presence that enlivens my participants, which is closely related to the notion of phantasm.

I observed that my participants' engagement with games of chance is a blend of nostalgia for the past and speculation about the future, crafting a vision of what might be achieved through luck. They adeptly weave together moments of play infused with vitality, continually refreshing their aspirations to navigate economic hardships and uncertainties. I argue that 'survivance', serving as an analytical lens for understanding my participants' pursuit of luck, carries dual significance. First, it stands as an affirmation of their existence and continuity of life, actively pursued through the quest for luck and participation in games, a sentiment strongly emphasised by the participants themselves. Secondly, it encompasses a realm of objects, concepts, narratives, beliefs, and materials inherited from the past—such as symbols of luck, tales about the lucky dealers, and associated sayings and symbols—that persist and are utilised in present times, embodying a quality of 'survivance' (Derrida 2011; Vizenor 2008). My participants persistently renewed their hope for a future win. They engage in games of chance as a means to nurture hope amidst uncertainties, envisioning alternatives as a way to endure life challenges.

Figure 4 – Image of one of the scratch cards that Mert purchased thrown away on the ground

Conclusion

On living
Living is no laughing matter
I mean, you must take living so seriously
that even at seventy, for example, you'll plant olive trees—
and not for your children, either,
but because although you fear death you don't believe it,
because living, I mean, weighs heavier
                Nâzim Hikmet – February 1948[18]

This poem was written by the Turkish poet Nâzim Hikmet who wrote it during his time in prison. Despite being a political prisoner who had to flee his homeland for most of his life, Hikmet thought that the act of living, with all its intensity, cruelty, and misfortune, outweighs the constant fear of annihilation and death that humans face. To live seriously is to maintain an interest in life and be engaged in the vitality of living. Survivance is about the act of living. Dreams, hopes, and imaginations of a better life bind people to the act of living, which is

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[18] Translated by Randy Blasing and Mutlu Konuk (1994). See the translated poem in full in the poet's archive at https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/literature/nazim/onliving.html

'serious and no laughing matter'. My participants' engagement with games of chance, however, is situated alongside their everyday laborious realities, intimately linked to their experiences of the Turkish economic crisis and contingency of life. Despite the absence of luck in their precarious lives, my participants hoped that luck would eventually materialise and favour them. Their involvement in numerical games of chance was described as a quest to discover fortune and find luck, rather than mere gambling. The elements of play, marked by vitality and anticipation, were evident in how they employed their imagination and hopeful thoughts during their engagement with numerical chance games.

The mere possibility of the presence of luck (Hage 2020), amplified the thought of 'What if I win?!', which motivated them to chase the phantasm of luck. In addition to feeling excited, my participants frequently mentioned being nostalgic about family gatherings around the New Year's Lottery draw and related their pursuit of luck to the stories of old Turkish movies in the 1970s and 80s featuring stories of lotteries and becoming rich overnight. Cartoonish and childish advertising capitalises on the nostalgic memories of the younger generation, indicating that the lottery is a joyful and innocent form of entertainment. Participation in lotteries in Turkey serves as both a social and individual endeavour that was initiated to contribute to national causes, such as the establishment of the Turkish Pilot Association.

My participants' experiences challenge the widely held belief that engaging in games of chance is an act of escape, despite the fact that their engagement may not always appear constructive or positive. Additionally, each type of game of chance or commercial gambling has its own dynamics and attracts different individuals who seek different affective states from their engagement with the game. Some seek escape, whereas others seek vitality and presence. Their involvement in games of chance aims to establish a sense of presence by incorporating play and envisioning luck as a means of reclaiming the time spent in demanding work settings (Hammering 2022). Rather than emphasising the loss of control or self-liquidation (Schüll 2012), their objective was to use games as a tool for coping with laborious conditions. Lastly, this article underscores the importance of recognising a context-specific approach to comprehend different modes of participation in games of chance and their impact on individuals to understand the embeddedness of different economic activities (Polanyi, 1977) and the intricate motivations behind lottery participation, influenced by social, cultural, and emotional aspects.

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MEDIA'S STREET POLITICS:
INVISIBLE INFRASTRUCTURES OF FILMING IN CAIRO

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The relationship between media, especially cinema, and cities is subject to anthropological and media studies inquiries alike. This paper analyzes the labor relations of on-location filming in Cairo, which moves across different urban geographies, from the slum to the elite gated community. These labor relations defy the formal/informal and exploitation/resistance binaries, because they fundamentally operate on communal dependencies while multiplying to scaffold and sustain the media industry economically. The paper explores whether understanding precarious laborers' tactics and mechanics can offer an alternative conception of media's politics that is attuned to the ambivalences and contradictions of life within neoliberal capitalism. Accordingly, it proposes a consideration of 'vitalist pragmatics' as a potential capacious 'verb' for the concept of survivance.

Keywords: Infrastructure, media, vitalist pragmatics, informality, labor, Egypt

Introduction

Egypt's media industry is one of the oldest and most structured in the Southwest Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region.[2] Academic discourse[3] reinforces Egyptian media's status as a producer of cultural hegemony in the region, as a mirror of local social issues caused by the state as a

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[2] After the first Lumière screening in Paris, several screenings of their film took place in Egypt in 1896, Algiers, Morocco and Tunisia in 1897, and in Palestine in 1900. The film industry in the region came swiftly into being during the first half of the 1900s (Shafik 2007: 10).
[3] Scholars like Abu-Lughod (2008), Armbrust (2000; 2011) and Shafik (2007) explicate various nuances of this relational configuration of cultural production, media, and politics in Egypt.

function of governance or political regimes, or as ideological doctrine[4] with regards to issues like gender fundamentalism, developmentalism, etc. This sparks a question: if academic discourses are timelessly invested in cinema/media's representations of these issues, then what can the inner processes of media-making reveal?

Figure 1 – A commercial film set in Downtown Cairo, Egypt 2019. Photo by Author

> Almost every area in Cairo has a contractor. No crew can shoot a minute in Nasr City, for example, without having an agreement with Shaaban. Some time ago, he was a fruit seller in the area. Now he has almost complete authority on the shooting locations in the area, from apartments and shops to street corners. He can take up to 10% commission from the production budget for locations. In the high season, he can have seven locations running. He wouldn't be present in person; he'd still get a commission because his men will be facilitating things […] Even when we have all the legal permits to shoot on the street, there is no way we can get the job done without constant arrangements and negotiations with the people who have actual authority on their streets. (Hady in an interview with the author, Summer 2018, Cairo)

Hady, a media production assistant in his mid-twenties, told me about the extreme filming conditions on Cairo's streets and what they entail. As a film location is an instant attraction site for people from all walks of life, it becomes an intense contact zone for all sorts of conflict. What

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[4] In my view, literature on film in Egypt implies a distinction between '*al dawla* - the state' and '*al nizam* - regime', the former implies an attention to the operations of governance such as permits and censorship (e.g., Mansour 2012; El Khachab 2016) while the later entails the intellectual sponsorship and active endorsement or direct commission of films that support and popularize a certain ideology such as socialism or liberalism (e.g., Armbrust 1995; Khatib 2006; Abu-Lughod 2008; Elsaket 2013; 2015)

Hady described can seem like 'informal' agreements. Still, it exposes two facts: that media production is, in part, dependent on informal economies, and that the city is not easily commodifiable or capturable. Another interlocutor told me that one of the biggest commercial film producers had to leave a location after almost getting beaten up because he offended the *baltagi* or 'gangster' in the slum area where they were filming. These insights illuminate the entanglements between media and the city, not only symbolically and aesthetically[5] but also economically, socio-politically, and physically. Counter to the Egyptian state's formal/official scrutiny over the city through the multiple required official permits, and most recently a substantive daily filming fee,[6] there are complex informal agreements that need to be made with the people who have immediate authority over 'their streets', as Hady stated. These people could be kiosk owners, doormen, low-rank traffic officers, or even an area's elderly neighbors. Despite the power differential between them as urban inhabitants and the state, they all can render the state-issued permits useless if they wish. Clearly, the state does not have a monopoly over the city despite its security apparatuses; thus, its discourse constantly frames informal areas and labor as entities that need to be cleansed, rescued, developed, and formalized (e.g., Bayat and Denis 2000; Khalil 2019)

If we follow the Marxist theory of commodity fetishism,[7] we recognize that once cinema/media becomes a commodity, then all the labor that goes into its making (must) become invisible.[8] In turn, whenever labor is studied, the narrative predominantly defaults to the binary of exploitation and/or resistance; hence it is always already political. The concept of 'survivance', as used in Native American discourses, provides a more expansive understanding of resistance and a less victimizing register for something more than just survival (Vizenor 1994; 2009). As a framework that works against loss and erasure, violence and retaliation, reparation and thriving creation, it speaks to contexts outside the Native American experiences but also draws a thread of connectivity and sharedness to the ways people pivot towards an array of strategies of endurance, resilience, as well as resourcefulness and refusal of the terms dictated on them by the existing power structures. The compelling aspect of survivance that I want to highlight here is its accountability to both the enduring damage done to people's lives, as well as the refusal to frame these lives as mere reactions to this violence. This, in my view, corresponds to the ways in which the conception of 'vitalist pragmatism'[9] which means 'the permanent calculation of opportunities

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[5] In film studies, city and politics is a prominent analytical theme (e.g., Bruno 1993; Buck-Morss 1995; Penz and Lu 2011). For example, Paula Massood (2003) illuminates the intersection between urban environments and experiences, race, and history in both African-American and Hollywood narrative films. These urban-filmic examinations are instrumental in reorganizing art's relation to politics via space.

[6] According to local news coverage in 2021, Cairo governate attempted to impose a 100,000 Egyptian Pound per day or 15,000 per hour for any commercial filming in Cairo's streets, which was met with resistance and discontent from media officials.

[7] Value is presented as inherent to commodities, rather than emerging from the interpersonal relationships that produced the commodity (Marx 1867, Chapter One). For further analysis on film and commodity fetishism, check Chihab El Khachab's 'The reification of concrete work in Egyptian film production'.

[8] Arguably, the invisiblization of labor is also what gives the commodity its fetishistic character.

[9] Vitalism can be traced back to Aristotle's thoughts on biological phenomenon as distinct from inanimate objects, which was opposed by Descartes' declaration that all living beings are 'automata' or different only in the complexity

as a collective mode of being' (Gago 2017: 14) and invites a rethinking of what kind of politics is possible, or even just feasible, within foreclosed conditions of possibility. In this paper, I argue that the binary of exploitation/resistance obscures the tactics and mechanics of *how* labor is political. Can understanding these tactics inform an alternative conception of politics that is attuned to the ambivalences and contradictions of life within neoliberal capitalism?[10]

Based on two years of ethnographic research in 2019-2021, this paper focuses on on-location filming or filming in the city, not in studios and plateaus, because it is a) a specific 'event' that moves across and defies formal/informal labor categories, and across urban contexts from the slum to the elite gated community and everywhere in between, b) a hyper-condensed temporality[11] that intensifies social relations across class, gender, professional occupations, etc. c) an integral process to a substantively commercial endeavor, i.e., media production that is part and parcel of local/urban, regional, and global neoliberal economy, and d) it articulates the permeability of urban space and the disruption of its inner borders by transforming the streets from their 'formal' function into an 'artistic' function, while negotiating with urban inhabitants who own these streets. The production crews, primarily male youth precarious workers, interface with all these city areas to make a living. Despite state authority, each of these city areas is semi-run by its inhabitants, fixers, and sub-fixers. The mammoth media industry ties the two entities of the production workers and urban inhabitants together. These ties involve labor relations that are intricately multilayered yet not as haphazard as they might appear at face value. Although unequally footed, economic transactions happen unconventionally through unregulated and unlikely transactions, and proliferate within these intricate labor relations. These labor relations defy the binaries of formal/informal as well as exploitation/resistance because they retain their communal dependencies while multiplying and growing substantially to become fundamental in the media industry's economy and, simultaneously, create alternative circuits of livelihood. Calculations of this kind to accomplish a task seem informal and haphazard; however, these iterations of forged social relations, which are dubbed 'love', are essentially a backup infrastructure for both the formal infrastructure of the state and industry that is constantly falling apart. As a result, they can be considered systematic tactics that double as backup infrastructure for the media sector.

Precarity is said to be conceived according to two mainstreams: as symptomatic of changing labor conditions and failures of the welfare state and as an ontological condition

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of their mechanics. The most relevant interventions here are, first, Bergson's 'élan vital – vital impulse' or the inevitability of the presence of an original common impulse which explains the creation of all living species, and Spinoza's 'potencia - potentiltiy' which blurs the hierarchy between action and inaction (Ruddick 2010). Conversely, pragmatism can be traced to early twentieth-century American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, and other prominent schools such as instrumentalism. However, Gago specifically builds on Paolo Virno's 'opportunism of the masses', that was introduced in his book *A grammar of the multitude: for an analysis of contemporary forms of life* (2003).
[10] Neoliberal capitalism 'serves as a quick, widely understood diagnostic of a set of policies […] privatization, reductions in social protections, financial deregulation, labor flexibilization, etc.' (Gago 2017: 1)
[11] Work orders at minimum would be 12-14 hours and are very likely to span a full 24 hours or more. Usually, there is only one day per week as a break. A film can take up to 6 weeks of daily shooting with one day per week as a break; a 30-episode T.V. series would take 3-5 months.

characterized by interdependency that creates new forms of life (Han 2018: 332). In the first stream, there are two origin stories of the concept; the first traces the concept to Marx's 'lumpenproletariat', the unemployed/unproductive masses that lack class consciousness and accordingly can be easily swayed in whichever political direction, i.e., individualistic opportunists. The other origin story emerges from studies of 'informal economies' in African cities since the 1970s, which view the urban precariat as either or both dispossessed victims and/or resistant forms of life. It is worth noting that both origin stories share a logic of hustling that signifies and points to individual flexibility, calculation, and risk. Following some context, I will contend with the second origin story of precarity, and later I will revisit the first to re-question the moralization of the notion of opportunism and its ambivalence.

The paper proposes moving beyond notions of hustling and informality as a diagnosis for these processes and entangled realities to suggest learning from them as praxis of 'vitalist pragmatism' (Gago 2017: 142) that I argue can be seen as the inner organizing logic of urban precarity. This move allows the analysis to go beyond moralizing registers and to problematize the slot of collateral damage/quotidian resistance that the 'urban poor' are predominantly assigned to. In this sense, my purpose is to further challenge and complicate dominant conceptions of resistance and politics by accounting for the nuances of urban labor precarity in its interface with neoliberalism[12] – primarily as they manifest in the unique condensed reality of media-making.

Context: debunking the commodity and accounting for its laborers

According to Mohamed Serour,[13] the late president of the Cinema Workers' Trade Union,[14] there are around 5,400 technical workers. He estimates that there can be about 300 people per each of the eighteen professions he registered in the Ministry of Labor in 2017 (lighting technicians, wardrobe assistants, makeup artists, hairstylists, set builders, location services personnel, etc.). Besides Serour's estimation, there is hardly any official data to indicate the actual number, nonexistent on the website of the Federation of Egyptian Industries' Cinema Chamber, which is part of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Most technical workers are employed by their sub-crew's craftmaster like gaffers, grips, set builders, etc. who are usually hired by their respective head of department like cinematographers, art directors, etc. The heads of departments are

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[12] Urban neoliberalism is an organizing concept in urban studies where the urban is seen as 'a key scale through which neoliberal policy interventions are enacted.' (Kern and Mullings 2013: 24)

[13] This is based on multiple conversations with Serour, and discussions during general union meetings that I attended.

[14] The trade union is different from the cinematic occupational union, which represents artistic occupations like directors, scriptwriters, cinematographers, etc. The Cinematic Occupations Syndicate was a trade union under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs from 1943 till 1955 when Law 142 was issued by the post-colonial government, thus transforming it into an occupational union the same as the doctors, lawyers, and journalists' union. Thus, it functions as a certifying board for media practitioners and a labor union. With these two functions, it is able to withhold permits and deny the membership needed to practice the profession.

chosen by the director (sometimes with deliberation with artistic and executive producers) and have contracts with the production companies. Although the head of each sub-crew would most likely have a contract with the production company, the workers would have no regular contracts, health care, or job security. Even a contract can hardly guarantee the craftmaster any rights in the case of a dispute, thus they are precarious like their crews although they might have some control over their precarity. Work in media, especially cinema and T.V. is seasonal, which essentially places the technical workers in the government's category of 'Irregular Labor'. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Egyptian government launched an aid program for this category of laborers. The Minister of Labor stated that only in Cairo Governorate, 22.626 million pounds were allocated to irregular laborers; each grant was a meager 500 EGP (approx. $27) per applicant.[15] In one of the general assemblies of the union, Serour encouraged struggling workers to apply to that fund and insightfully pointed to the fact that this funding scheme will help the state apprehend and formalize all the informal workers through taxes but perhaps, in return, it will give them proper services and protections such as health care and social security.

Media's technical workers are predominately men; most of them could be economically and culturally classified as, for lack of better terms, lower- to middle-class or non-elite in background, education, cultural capital, income, etc. As diverse and precarious as the workers are, they are a foundational infrastructure for the media industry; without the lighting technicians, the cinematographer cannot work; without production workers, nothing will run smoothly on set; and without the location services providing a constant supply of tea and coffee, everyone on set will self-combust from the pressure of the minimum eighteen hours work-orders. The production budgets for films and T.V. series can range between thirty and a hundred million Egyptian Pounds (approx. $1.6M-$5.5M), and commercials can cost even more. While the workers' income is a minor fraction of these budgets, location rental expenses take up a considerable percentage of budgets (about 15-20% depending on the number, criteria, and durations required). Despite the substantiative allocations to filming locations, the inner dynamics of that fundamental part of media production is contingent on seemingly informal labor networks.

How media uses the city: urban precarity between informality and hustling

Sobhy, a well-established artistic producer, captures the commodification process of urban space. In an interview in the Fall of 2019 in an alley coffee shop with a soccer match blasting in the

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[15] As reported by journalist Maher Hendawy in 'Disbursing the Irregular Employment Grant. 22.6 million pounds in Cairo', *Al Watan Newspaper*, July 6, 2021.

background, I asked him, 'so what do you teach your production assistants to prepare them for exterior filming?'[16]

> Sobhy: 'كله بالحب بيفك (everyone eases up through love). This is how you handle work correctly under *this* capitalist mania.'

> I commented deviously: So 'love' is what makes things work, and in the end, capitalism benefits from it.

> Sobhy replied in a matter-of-fact manner as he blew a cloud of smoke from his hookah: 'Of course!' I probably still looked skeptical of the term 'through love', so he continued: 'Look, I teach them the ways of journalism: Who, Where, How, and Why? The five fundamental questions. We're 120-150 people, average of fifty cars, all that without the extras. There are a minimum of three massive trucks of lighting, crane, and wardrobe – you move in a convoy, it's horrible! So you have to navigate and negotiate with all of society's complexes on the streets.'

He then elaborated on how some areas become cinematic because there is someone who teaches them what cinema is. Local residents gradually acquire knowledge that they will all make a profit. As he vividly puts it: 'if they sit in front of your kiosk, you get 50 pounds. If they open that window, you get 40. If they place the light on your window, you get something. So, everyone benefits and starts cooperating and working.' While Sobhy makes things sound like automated transactions solely motivated by these meager 'profits', his expression – بالحب (through love) – is important to flag here, especially because it is a widely used expression among my interlocutors. The term signals an affective calculative rationality that media production workers have to hone together with their multitasking, management of logistics, and enduring physical exhaustion of being on set for over twenty hours. I will engage this expression, 'through love', later to allow space for other ethnographic narratives to provide more insights.

In addition to Sobhy's view, Mazen, another well-established producer, would cynically refer to production workers from time to time as: عمال تراحيل (day wage laborers), عساكر امن مركزي (central security soldiers)[17], سمكري بيشتغل بسمعته (a mechanic relying on his reputation for jobs). These descriptions signal not only precarity and irregular employment but also the ability to endure hardship, follow orders, and the volatility of securing income based on reputation. I flag these descriptions because they index the compounded layers of meaning embedded in the labor of production workers, especially as they secure shooting locations in the city. To illustrate, Mazen gave me the example of filming in gated communities which indexed a systemic knowledge

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[16] On-location filming in Arabic is تصوير خارجي (the literal translation would be 'exterior filming'). Interestingly, unlike directors or cinematographers or even the technical meaning of the term, for production crews any filming not done in plateaus or studios is called 'exterior', even if filming in a residential apartment. This is because they are interfacing with the external side of the shooting in terms of dealing with the streets (people, cars, police, fixers, etc.).

[17] Central security soldiers in Egypt are considered the lowest of the police hierarchy with the worst conditions and income.

of what needs to be done to secure that particular location for filming. I intentionally use the wording of systemic knowledge because, in this light, media production is more than urban hustling, it is a deep reading of the urban and negotiating it for commercial media use.

Mazen, in the production workshop I was attending in 2019, taught us the Euro-American standard method of script breakdown of locations. It is basically an Excel sheet where you go through the script scene by scene and extract the locations in one column (e.g., an old apartment, a school backyard, an agricultural field, etc.), dividing them between interior/exterior and day/night. In the following column, you would add up how many scenes are shot in that location and how many pages of the script are next to it. These steps take on a particular complexity in Cairo as evident in Mazen's cautionary example:

> Suppose an apartment in a gated community is required. In that case, you have to be aware that you will need two different permissions besides the state official permissions and that of the owner to secure such a place: the permission of the owners' association and that of the management of the compound…not many people anticipate these as entities that can disrupt the shooting and cause massive financial losses. You can have the agreement of the apartment owner, but you will have the bougie neighbors complain and even call the police on you – you have to establish full control not only on the location but all its different components.

In contrast to gated communities which currently vary in prices, design, and type of investors and, consequently, class of owners, a more 'middle' class inhabits Cairo's center. In public/popular perception, this middle-class is perceived and characterized as more conservative, thus having more moral capital and consequently more control over the city.[18]

Sobhy articulated the entanglement of class politics acutely when I asked him about the things to consider in choosing a location in the city and estimating how to secure it:

Mariz: Do you think this has to do with areas' class?

Sobhy: Totally! The middle-class always has issues, unfortunately!

Mariz: Issues like 'oh cinema is حرام (sinful or forbidden)'

Sobhy: Yes, and also like: 'oh, where will we go if we give you our apartment? It's embarrassing to ask the neighbors or relatives to host us – why bother!' This petit bourgeois attitude أبو دم تقيل ده (equivalent to being uptight with no sense of humor), اللي هو الرخم البايخ المحفلط المظفلط ده (the type of attitude that is boring, irritating, slimy, and unnecessarily picky). In some other situation, you're shooting in an apartment building, and you have a neighbor with this attitude

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[18] There are endless incidents where the neighbors or doormen would report a resident to the police or taking it upon themselves to 'correct' the resident behavior for suspecting any form of promiscuity (for example, unmarried opposite sex couples cannot safely live together, and single women living alone can also face similar problems).

telling you, 'I will call the police; you're causing a big disturbance'. So, you tell him, 'I will make the star get ready in your apartment', so he says, 'what will you pay me?' You say, '500 EGP', so he agrees – and suddenly, it's no disturbance for him anymore.

In contrast to filming in a gated community, this example shows another dimension of production workers' systemic knowledge and how they strategically deploy it to secure and use the city for media-making. Sobhy relayed how this class's convenience, uptightness, lack of flexibility, and humor get resolved by two deals: money and proximity to film stars (i.e., prestige or proxy social capital).

One might ask, is that neighbor merely hustling when he changes his position for money and prestige? Is Sobhy hustling when he calculates and manipulates the neighbor's class disposition? In some capacity, they are making informal monetary deals on the periphery of the formal economy, through banal negotiations, with no guarantee for any of them that they will get or archive what they want, except for their instantaneous rapport and gauging of each other's honesty. Cottom states, 'Hustling traditionally refers to income-generating activities that occur in the informal economy. It has also become synonymous with a type of job-adjacent work that looks like it is embedded in the formal economy but is governed by different state protections, which makes the work risky and those doing it vulnerable' (2020: 19). This characterization of hustling partially maps out on both the production workers, who have no formal employment protection and the urban inhabitants, who might cooperate with production crews for a quick buck. This relation appears improvisational, autonomous, and simple.

On the other hand, Chihab El Khachab has framed the work of film production in Egypt, and scouting locations specifically, through the concept of 'imponderable problems', which he characterizes as problems that: 'escape the individual agent's capacity to envision all courses of action leading onto the expected outcome of a socio-technical process, thereby leading these agents to rely on well-honed assumptions and mediators to make this process contingent in its unfolding' (2016: 21). While El Khachab points to the inner processes of dealing with contingency, I want to reassess them as an embedded functional infrastructure. I do this reassessment because the mechanism of imponderability is complementary and resonant with that of hustling as a casual and unplanned activity, which I want to question and supplement. My point is to read and recast these labor relations as a systematic infrastructure. In his reconsideration of informality, AbdouMaliq Simone traces how networks of socialities and collaboration function as a backup infrastructure to the 'dysfunctionality' of African urban cities. Simone does not romanticize these collaborations as resistance necessarily. Instead, he analyzes them to demonstrate 'that new trajectories of urban mobility and mobilization are taking place in the interstices of complex urban politics.' Different urban populations and their capacities 'are provisionally assembled into surprising, yet often dynamic, intersections outside of any formal opportunity the city presents for the interaction of diverse identities and situations' (2004: 62). In a sense, conventional infrastructures are organizing and hegemonizing systems. Simone invokes an opportunity to

distort that view by reading infrastructure as a recombinant plurality that does not subdue its inner conflicts.

Production workers' ability to deal with 'all of society's complexes', as Sobhy puts it, becomes a crucial infrastructure of the media industry. This not only requires what El Khachab has framed as 'well-honed assumptions and mediators to make this process contingent in its unfolding' (2016: 21), but to develop a systematic knowledge that is tied most essentially to awareness of class politics and dynamics. These considerations centralize the question: what constitutes the politics of cities, and how do these politics morph and unfold through their inhabitants? I.e., my initial question: how do politics work in so-called 'informal' labor in cities?

In the months I worked with Yehia's production crew, I would always ask about his strategy for resolving conflicts, and he would always also say: 'بالحب (through love)'. His method corresponds to the concept of people's networks and relations as infrastructure but is more attuned to the centrality of labor and business. In a sense, Yehia's case shares some features of Simon's theorizations but resists any neat application and challenges the notion of hustling as it stands for a survival mechanism or a last resort (Thieme 2017).[19] He demonstrates the multi-scalar structures at work and, more significantly, how 'love', or what can be read as resourcing knowledge of society and being able to navigate and smooth over its frictions, becomes an 'organizing system'. When we spoke about on-location shooting, he briefly told me the same formal rules as Mazen. Still, he intuitively emphasized that all these logistical preparations need to be supplemented with a substantive duration of 'hanging out' in the location so that the people of the place get used to you. He explained with ease and attentiveness:

> I start going to sit in the coffee shop in a certain area. I talk with people; I consciously noticing every detail. Is it crowded? Oh, who is this fighting? Who controls this corner? You hang out and ask about all details. I take the doorman, walk around, and ask who the residents are, the annoying ones. You can't just 'like' a place and say, let's film here. In some areas, I will be able to find the one-person مسيطر على المنطقة (in control of the area), and that is always better. I then take him and sit in the coffee shop and talk. I must be in a place for at least a week *so that people will get used to me and my face and my presence*; you can't just parachute on a place like that. Even if you are still scouting and don't have time, then there are a couple of hours every two-three days to go sit with that fixer in the area to establish that: انت بتاعي بقى (*I own you now*), you have to secure everything. If you control/dominate the location, everything else is resolvable, but if there is a danger, then the shooting is suspended, like if the people kick you out, then what can you do? It would be a disaster.

> Mariz: Of course, the day is ruined, but you still got to pay everyone.

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[19] 'The hustle economy [...] Occupies three main spheres of meaning: hustle as a "last resort" survival mechanism; hustle as "livelihood strategies" including economic opportunism, diversification of income streams and risk management; and hustle as the contestations to structures of authority.' (Thieme 2013: 390)

Yehia: Yeah, but worse is *you lose time* till you find a similar place. If you're filming soon, I go sit for about 10 hours to understand the dynamic because we're many on a shooting day, cars, trucks, many people, and we're destructive and noisy.

Besides the obvious resonance between Yehia's 'hanging out' and Clifford Geertz's (1998), which I shared with Yehia telling him that this is exactly how they teach us anthropologists to do research, I would emphasize that the point of Yehia's strategy is not to get to know people, but to *secure territory of and for production*. Jonas and Ward (2007: 170) make the case that territorialities are constructed politically and through the day-to-day activities and practices pertaining to consumption and social reproduction. These considerations invoke Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, i.e., 'the ways in which surplus-value is produced through the commodification and exchange of space [as well as] representation of space [and] through the everyday, lived experience of space, and through the collective meanings of representational space' (Roy 2013: 825). The anchor here in securing the territory is precisely to produce surplus value through the temporary commodification of urban space into a sellable image – a permanent commodity, i.e., via media's use of the city. What is significant here is the acute recognition that the city is not easily commodifiable; the city must get 'its own cut'.

Yehia embodies another articulation of 'through love' because everyone often praises him for being fair and kind. A crewmate rationalized this to me: 'Yehia makes everyone feel appreciated and more human because he does not try to trick people into saving money for the producers like most production managers do.' Yehia undoubtedly is one of the most decent people I worked with, but he also reveals that decency alone cannot make you a good production manager. He supplements this view by detailing the micro-dynamics that are at play in on-location filming:

Yehia: I have to do 'the hanging out' because I come to an area with 120 people minimum. All come with different mentalities! I bring in actors and workers, and technicians من فوق خالص لتحت خالص (from the highest top to the lowest low) of different classes and personalities. So, you must ensure that these people aren't dealing with each other directly. Otherwise, it will be كارثة (a disaster). You have to meditate, and you must handle all transactions and altercations because you can deal with people based on your knowledge of their capacity and mentality. أي حد عايز يتعامل مع الجمهور لازم يتعامل من خلالي (*anyone* who wants to interact with the public/the people has to do it through me)

Mariz: And are conflicts always resolved with money?

Yehia: Not really! Some people refuse to take money to use their space even if they are very poor. Some are super greedy, like: I want 20k if you want to film in front of my shop. To them, we look like we are spending millions, and they want part of it, but it's absurd! Even those you must resolve things with them

in whichever way. إن الدنيا شغالة ده اهم حاجة (that things keep going, that's the most important thing).

Yehia here signals multiple crucial factors to understand how the city uses media and how media uses the city. The acute recognition of class distinctions and potential conflicts becomes a profitable quality for production workers and, by proxy, for the media industry at large. On some level, media as industry profits off the production workers' ability to mediate the potentially conflicting difference of the city inhabitants. On another level, production workers profit from the relations they forge with 'love' in a filming location. Subsequently, the people of that area also benefit financially from the media industry. Although it seems that everyone benefits; however, it is crucial to recognize the stark difference between this benefitting and the massive profits that producers make. Recognizing these tactics complicates the 'urban poor' slot as hustlers operating haphazardly or victims exploited helplessly.

This unique and recurring emphasis on 'love' tells of the monetization of care labor that scaffolds all the formal technical labor of shooting like lighting and gripping. Although the word حب translates to love, in fact, it carries a multitude of significations. For one, it signifies a way of rapidly building rapport with and gaining sympathy from total strangers on the street to get a task done, such as making a car wait until the shot is done. Another is invoking and using shared connections, be it people you worked with in the past or even the city or area you are from, to find a middle ground in a disagreement or secure alliances on set. As an example, I overheard a colleague on the production crew low-key bragging about how he resolved a parking situation with a person: 'I asked him where he is from. He said I'm from Sayeda Zainab. I told him do you know this and that person, and he said yes. I told him then we're relatives – and everything worked out.' I personally experienced how I started operationalizing my niceness, genuine or feigned care, and invoking sharedness of certain sentiments of status, in order to constantly be able to manage people and resolve issues during filming as a production assistant. For example, at times, a 'picky' actress would be giving the crew hell because she doesn't think her caravan is clean or good enough; I found myself stepping in and intentionally dropping a few sentences in English to assure her that I know what she means but also to limit her complaints by flagging my perceived class. Just as fast, I would code-switch to voicing my irritation from the actress' attitude when I ask the location services to clean the caravan again so that they would not be antagonistic against me personally or the production crew overseeing their tasks. These types of calculations to get a job done seem haphazard and informal; however, as evident in these situations, these iterations of forged social relations that are dubbed as 'love' become a backup infrastructure to the perpetually falling formal infrastructures of both the industry and the state. Accordingly, they can qualify as systematic tactics that double function as a backup infrastructure to the media industry.

In this section, I demonstrated that in securing a location, there are multiple aspects of hustling, specifically, 'hustle' as a 'livelihood strategy' and 'contestation of authority' (Thieme 2013). If you recall, media-makers can legally film anywhere once they secure all the formal state

and security permission. Yet, urban inhabitants of all classes have a degree of informal authority over the filming processes – they can and do contest the formal authority of the state, the municipality, and the capitalist power of the media industry. Additionally, as will become more evident in the following section, I will examine how urban inhabitants carve out an extra source of income by cooperating with media-makers, which eventually turns into economic resourcefulness and sometimes into a total monopoly over entire areas, like the example of Shaaban that Hady gave us earlier. In response to that informal authority, the production crews whose livelihoods partly depend on negotiating and securing these locations must then engage in constant calculation and management of risk and economic opportunity. It is worth noting that the notion of hustling as economic opportunism is ladened with negative moralizing connotations. That is why Paolo Virno's non-moralizing definition is crucial:

> The roots of opportunism lie in an outside-of-the-workplace socialization marked by unexpected turns, perceptible shocks, permanent innovation, chronic instability. Opportunists are those who confront a flow of ever-interchangeable possibilities, making themselves available to the greater number of these, yielding to the nearest one, and then quickly swerving from one to another. This is a structural, sober, non-moralistic definition of opportunism. It is a question of a sensitivity sharpened by the changeable chances, a familiarity with the kaleidoscope of opportunities, an intimate relationship with the possible, no matter how vast. (2003: 86)

Virno's definition partially helps but does not fit the case at hand neatly. The case of on-location filming in Cairo articulates that sense of opportunism yet completely employ it in the workplace, or rather an ever-changing, highly unstable, and dynamic workplace. The coordinates are slightly more dynamic and operational than in these discourses, thus adding layers of complexity to the notion of hustling and allowing for a more nuanced and substantial understanding of its workings in the urban precarity of neoliberal capitalism. In what follows, I want to move beyond hustling and informality as a diagnosis to instead consider them as tactics of 'vitalist pragmatism' (Gago 2017) that I argue can be seen as an alternative organizing logic of urban precarity.

How the city uses media: fractal accumulation and communitarian capital

Veronica Gago introduces the idea of communitarian capital and fractal accumulation (2017: 45), which helps us get closer to a nuanced understanding of urban precarity and the politics it engenders. She characterizes communitarian capital by its ambiguity – meaning that 'it is liable to function in terms of self-management, mobilization, and insubordination and *also* as a mode of servitude, submission, and exploitation' (ibid, original italics). The key here is the 'and *also*', because it admits the inner conflicts and inter-relationalities of communities and, more

importantly, transcends the moralizing readings, which reinforce the victimization/romanticization narratives.

The story of how Mahmoud became a sub-fixer in Nasr City illustrates how communitarian capital looks on the ground. Mahmoud is in his late fifties, originally from Aswan in the south of Egypt. He owns a kiosk on a side street in Nasr City. This kiosk is what coincidentally got him to make a living through media production solely. I interviewed him during a shooting day for a Ramadan T.V. series I worked on as a production assistant in early 2020 as part of Yehia's production crew. He told me that about ten years ago, the production crew of a Vodafone commercial approached him to use his kiosk as a filming location. Mahmoud agreed and got paid, possibly more than he could ever get selling chips and candy in a week. Since then, he has connected with Shaaban, the main area fixer. Mahmoud explained to me:

> Shaaban is the one who deals with me all the time; over time, he became one of the founders of shooting in the area. Word-of-mouth echoes and spreads if you secure good service. He is a very respectable guy – he is *sha'by* (lower-class popular), but he knows how to deal with people and handle them. For example, he calls and asks me to secure the parking of five big trucks for the lighting and equipment trucks, which need to be close to the set or actors' caravans. Since I know every *sayies* (a person who parks cars) in the area, I'd coordinate with the *sayies* of that area, and I become the middleman between him and Shaaban – at the end بيراضينا *byradina.'*

'*Yradina*' is a striking verb to talk about labor and money. In part, it can be the verb for communitarian capital. In colloquial Egyptian Arabic, *el meradia,* as a noun, is an arbitrarily monetary transaction estimated by the payer and is assessed by the receiver as an acceptable amount or not. '*Yradi*' as a verb signals a mix of 'making up for something' and 'buying agreeability', and partly signifies charity because it is not mandatory, fixed, or necessarily correspondent to a set service fee. The receiver is someone who facilitates minor tasks as a service that is not obligatory, almost as a favor. However, a favor is not expected to be monetarily compensated. In this case, there is an expectation of payment, just not in a traditionally contractual way. *El meradia,* as a form of compensation for doing minor business, is ladened with hierarchies of power like any socioeconomic transaction. However, since the verb also connotates 'buying agreeability', it signifies that even though the payer has more capital than the receiver yet remains in urgent need of the receiver's cooperation and help. Because of that dependency, and because it is a negotiated exchange and not a formal contractual agreement, there is always room for bargaining and even contestation by the receiver. In other words, in the case above, Shaaban (the person with money and monopoly) is also the person who absolutely needs the service that only Mahmoud (the person with immediate authority over his streets) can provide with his communitarian capital and his spatial embeddedness in the texture of the city.

A capacity for contestation illuminates how the process of securing filming locations embodies more than just the exploitation of informal labor. For example, Mahmoud clarified that

he would always have a copy of the shooting permissions so that nothing disrupts the shooting, including the police. Mahmoud lowered his voice a bit and said:

> Yeah, they [the police] came this morning… but you know the police station knows me, even if there is conflict and say we end up at the police station, I'd get us out of it, كلهم حبايبي (ghey're all my darlings). Everyone on the streets knows me. I know the owner of this nightclub you're shooting in right now. I've been here since it was practically a desert with few buildings.

Mahmoud's confidence in the strength of his good relations with everyone in the area and his sense of ownership of the streets since they were 'a desert'[20] signals how he capitalizes and monetizes his dual capacity to both benefit media-makers by facilitating the filming and a capacity to ruin a filming day, which is considered a disaster for producers and their budgets as Yehia and others made clear.

Following Gago's mechanics of political economy, she probingly asks, 'What type of accumulation is this communitarian capital capable of?' She builds on Gutierrez Aguilar (2011) when she suggests that this type of communitarian capital produces a fractal system of accumulation. This essentially means that accumulation does not obey a progressive linear logic (like that of industrial accumulation), but 'associative M-C-M loops' that constantly and endlessly proliferate (Gago 2017: 46).[21] Loops and proliferation would function as follows: 'each point of accumulation would result in a new series [of accumulation] that would be dependent at its starting point but, at the same time, would relaunch itself as a new point of departure' (ibid).

Now let's take this theory out on the streets of Cairo and, with it, rethink the story of Shaaban, the fruit seller turned area-fixer; how did this happen exactly? I could not interview Shaaban, but by weaving the bits of information from multiple interlocutors, I can feasibly speculate. He was a fruit seller, meaning that every other household in the area frequented his shop and knew the shop owners around him (point 1 of accumulation); he was part of a community. One day Shaaban is approached by someone like Yehia, asking him to film in his shop. He agrees and makes some money (point 2 of accumulation, dependent on point 1 owning a fruit shop), but as we know, he would need to mediate things in the neighborhood, so he goes to the shops around him, asks for the favor of allowing 'the disturbance'.

The other shops' owners wouldn't necessarily make money, but Shaaban would owe them a favor. A few months later, Yehia returns to Shaaban, but this time he is looking for an apartment and two other shops. Shaaban takes the opportunity to return the favor to his neighboring shop owners by fixing the deal between them and Yehia (point 3 of accumulation, stems from point 2 but is not dependent on it) and gets a cut or a commission (point 4 of accumulation). One of these neighbors is Mahmoud, who makes money and contributes to facilitating other menial jobs.

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[20] The neighborhood Mahmoud is talking about is a relatively recent (1950s) urban extension to accommodate Cairo's growing population.
[21] M-C-M stands for money-commodity-money, the classic Marxist circuit for capitalist accumulation that is usually linear, not circular, and diffuse as in Gago's view.

Eventually, as Shaaban consolidates his reputation with media-makers and the word-of-mouth spreads, he consolidates his reputation as a fixer and cements his business relationship with Mahmoud as a sub-fixer – because now his business has proliferated, as Hady stated earlier. He cannot be in all locations all the time. Mahmoud eventually gets more gigs out of that corner of Nasr City (point 5 dependent on point 4) and recruits his nephews (points 6 of accumulation start from point 4 but are not directly dependent on it). The next time Yehia is filming in the area, Mahmoud will be his man, coordinating between the crew and the *sayies* (parking guy) to help park the convoy that accompanies filming; he gets his cut. The parking guy makes money (point 6 of accumulation, a proliferation of points 4 and 5 of accumulation, but still operates independently outside media production).

To this point, Gago's theory holds, but is it enough? Gago states that this fractal accumulation does not have a unidimensional goal of 'upward growth' and 'accumulation of capital'. Still, its goal is multiplication, which can be seen as an alternative drive for non-linear progress. Fractal accumulation operates in 'a networked way and enables a logic of scalar multiplication' and later asks if this operative goal of associative multiplication 'embodies a circular temporality [and] can become a counterpoint to the properly capitalist figure of possessive individualism' (2017: 47).

Like many fixers on Cairo's streets, Mahmoud and Shaaban illustrate the power of community relations that can both be an opportunity for collective profit. However, if 'the favors' are not reciprocated, if the reciprocity turns into a monopoly, community relations can be exploitative all the same. In all their complexity, these relations become essential infrastructure for media-making. Framing them as informal and unsystematic does not allow us to reflect fully on how they function. In response to that unofficial street authority, the production crews, as previously illustrated, whose livelihoods partly depend on negotiating and securing these locations, must then engage in constant calculation and management of risk and socio-economic calculation. Both the speculative reading of Shaaban's monopoly and the actual story of Mahmoud's integral control of the area can correspond to what Gago refers to as:

> The strategic composition of microentrepreneurial elements, with formulas of popular progress, that compose a political subjectivity capable of negotiating and disputing state resources, and effectively overlapping bonds of family and loyalty linked to the popular neighborhoods, as well as nontraditional contractual formats. (2017: 15)

Gago's theory is plausible so far, and I can wrap up the analysis here by arguing that 'media-making in Cairo embodies fractal accumulation that is highly dependent on social relations and works as an infrastructure providing a counterpoint to individualistic capital accumulation and linear temporality' – and probably no one will object. However, I want to add a provocation; the concept of 'community' and its derivatives are usually used in a positive, and even positivist, sense. For anything characterized as communal/communitarian, it means it is a good thing by default. This default may be due to leftist melancholia, the idealism of democracy, the exoticization of

anthropology, or even just a genuine reflex against neoliberal individualization. I want to push the need to acknowledge that beyond the idealistic reification of community, all communities (micro and macro, official and on the ground, radical or conformist) are full of contradictions. I have witnessed the multiple ways this communal capital can be exploitative and the various ways that this fractal accumulation can be unjustly distributed. These injustices become evident in how production crews or fixers exploit an owner of a new filming location by paying them less than other experienced owners. At other times, there is the usual class and social capital dynamic where the *sayies* (parking guy) would be dissatisfied with his payment but cannot dare object because the fixer, paying him, is well connected to the police. Most times, there are soul-crushing gendered aggressions that constantly move on the sliding scale of chauvinism-chivalry. This brings us back to my initial point about the ambivalences and contradictions of urban precarity and life and what they might be able to change about dominant conceptions of politics and resistance. Can ambivalence and contradiction complicate the moralizing registers that seek to either condemn or glorify human lives?

Towards an extramoral politics: mechanics and tactics of vitalist pragmatism

Throughout, I was bidding an intentional partial reading of theories from varied geopolitical locations, a bricolage or patching together perhaps that does not entrap ethnography in Truth, but allows conflicting truths. Ethnography tries out approaches, makes errors, readjusts, and tries again. I believe that in this heuristic process, there is a space for ethnography to do its own non-hegemonizing theorization without falling into isolating specificity or desperate universality.

I have given an in-depth view and analysis of the processes needed to enable and allow on-location filming as one central process in media-making in Egypt. It is a promiscuous media industry that has never been analyzed anthropologically in terms of its production until the late 20th century. I call it promiscuous, with no moralizing connotation, to give a sense of illusiveness that refuses categorical capture. The industry's technical workers, who inform my research, are described by an independent filmmaker as: 'أجرية (a mix of day laborers and mercenaries) – willing to do any and everything to get paid at the end of the day.' I was struck that he did not recognize any sharedness between the workers' precarity and his own.

They are, to a degree, but not exactly, proper proletariat or even lumpenproletariat in the Marxist sense. They are not exactly 'political subjects' or 'bare lives' in the terms Foucault and Agamben draw. They qualify as informal laborers who can also be viewed as evasive hustlers bearing a degree of criminal stigma, as victims of capitalism and failed welfare states, or as the epitome of quotidian resistance. As I pointed out throughout the paper, although these labels have some truth, they also reduce the complexity of the informal laborers' lives and obscure the dense processes, tactics, and strategies of making a living in the contemporary neoliberal economy. I propose that instead of the separatist binary of formal vs. informal labor, the case of

Egyptian media-making allows us to understand that what is categorized as an informal economy is not necessarily outside of or merely exploited by the formal economy. The seeming informality is usually relational and even integral to formal economies (Banks et al. 2020).

In this sense, I argue that vitalist pragmatism is a potentially more nuanced framework to *partially* understand the reality at hand. Vital pragmatics is related to Paolo Virno's (2003) definition of opportunism: 'the permanent calculation of opportunities as a collective mode of being.' Gago operationalizes this notion to argue that 'with this perspective, a clear strategy that opposes seeing the Popular sectors as victims can be traced. Such victimization, which also appears as moralization and criminalization, organizes a certain field of visibility for the issue.' (2017: 18) Furthermore, she frames neoliberalism as rationality, not just ideology, that works from above (global economy, policy, etc.) as well as from below (ordinary people resourcing that rationality by utilizing it, not just internalizing, being subjected to, or suffering it). This conception corresponds to the paper's concern not just to call something 'political' or 'resistant' – but to figure out the 'how'.

Vitalist pragmatism takes apart the dichotomy of individual and collective and reassembles them in an interdependent orientation towards their livelihood. It debunks the ongoing myth/mess of *Homo Economicus*, i.e., neoliberal reason is hijacking the political, which recreates and assumes a dichotomy between what is political and what is economic. As if the political need to be defended, purified of any economic lack to become liberatory or emancipatory. In other words, it gets us beyond the moralization (which produces victimizing, criminalizing, or/and romanticizing discourses) that tends to happen in analyzing power relations without falling into relativism. More importantly, the concept attentively captures what strategy and tactics are forged by precarious laborers and how they can be a way out of the foreclosure that I find in the rigid frames of agency/structure – free will/subjectification – democracy/authoritarianism – developing/developed nations – formal/informal. Instead, it allows *an extramoral conception of politics*, which gives a crucial understanding of how economies and the subjects producing and interfacing with them are conceived and how these subjects 'assemble energies and networks, cooperate, and compete', and in some capacity help us rethink some fundamental notions of our neoliberal era like 'progress, calculation and freedom' (Gago 2017: 18). Perhaps then, this can be a partial step 'to find a political vocabulary without smoothing over the contradictions and ambivalences.' (Gago 2017: 13)

Media's technical workers ferociously critique the exploitation of the capitalist industry and simultaneously some of them sometimes support the neoliberal militarized regime – all while they instantaneously craft transient solidarity. They are the foundational labor infrastructure to one of the biggest and, increasingly neoliberalized[22] media industries since the 1970s after Sadat's

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[22] In the 2000s, with satellite entering the scene, Saudi Arabia and the UAE ventured even more into the Egyptian film and T.V. industry through their two channels/production companies: ART (Saudi Arabia) and MBC (Saudi Arabia and Dubai). These two companies drastically shifted the market due to pumping money excessively into the T.V. drama industry to the extent of implosion, as well as cinema production. With the two entities currently competing over platform media production with the Egyptian platform WatchIt and global tycoon Netflix, the market is due for another reshuffle of power.

'open door' policies. Technical workers receive no formal education in media although they mostly have other educational degrees, and function as unofficial craft guilds that heavily rely on kinship networks yet enact excessive degrees of exploitation – in short, they embody a massive degree of contradiction and ambivalence.

These lived experiences of vitalist pragmatics offer a new range for the notion of survivance. Being precarious does not necessarily mean being impoverished. Workers of multinational companies who sign their resignation by default once they are hired (a common practice in Egyptian corporations) are precarious, and the creative class, waiting on one grant after the other, is precarious. The point is not equating multiple privileges and deprivileges people inhabit. The point is certainly not to reduce injustices to each other or blame it all wholesale on 'capitalism'. It is crucial to remain cautious about glossing over historical and systematic structures of othering and exploitation as precarity, i.e., the new universal human condition (Schueller and Johar 2009). The point is: that vitalist pragmatics might be a register to resource our common – but not equal or universal – precarity to potentially forge strategically intersectional practices of politics.

What remains to contemplate is what would these considerations of media labor and politics do to the practices and perceptions of media producers and audiences. In other words, would knowing how an image is made, if it is made fairly, and if its labor is not made invisible alter how this image is consumed and how it transpires and shapes the perception and subjectivity of its audience and makers? Although this requires a much longer more complex engagement, I would believe that it does. On one level, it would suffice to look at something of the magnitude of the #MeToo movement sparked by the crimes of film producer Harvey Weinstein, or the monumental mobilization of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) and the Writers Guild of America (WGA) strikes, or locally in Cairo, the increasing vocalization of discontent among media workers regarding worsening work conditions. On another level, there is a critical mass of experimentation in both feature and documentary films where the making of the film is intentionally made visible in the final product.[23] These experimentations testify to the potentially radical effect of inverting the 'normal' format of media production where its labor is invisible.

Acknowledgments

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[23] Films such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Beware of a holy whore* (1971), Elanor Coppola et al's *Hearts of darkness: a filmmaker's apocalypse* (1991), and Mawra Arsanios's *Amateurs, stars, and extras or the labor of love* (2018) are prime examples of the variety of deployments of the inner processes of filmmaking, each resulting in a radically different aesthetic, representation, and impact.

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'THERE WILL ALWAYS BE TRAVELLERS': CERTAINTY AS SURVIVANCE IN A NEW ALTERNATIVE WORLD?

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Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and other marginalised groups are often constructed as being present oriented. However, anthropologists working with such groups (Fotta 2019; Howarth 2019) have recently begun to demonstrate ways they do in fact orient themselves towards the future in the face of uncertainty. I will extend this work by examining how New Travellers, who only formed as a mobile group in the UK from the 1970s onwards and have suffered from state violence and high morbidity and mortality rates, attempt to ensure their endurance. Despite their short history and experiences of marginalisation, rather than defining their experience as uncertainty, I argue that New Travellers appear to successfully produce a sense of certainty regarding their shared future. This was captured by one interlocutor asserting that 'There will always be Travellers', despite the newest in a string of legislation criminalising their lifestyle being rolled out at the time. I thus ask whether and how Gerald Vizenor's (2009) concept of survivance may aid an understanding of this community's future-making activities, such as their modes of child socialisation, the telling of stories and their collective mediation of death. While the notion of survivance is in many ways pertinent, due to its embeddedness in Native American studies I conclude that it may not be wholly appropriate to apply it to the New Traveller context. Instead, extending work on human possibilities (Graeber 2007), I build on Elizabeth Povinelli's (2011) notion of new alternative worlds, proposing that the term 'alternative worldmaking' may better capture the norms, values and practices through which new groups both produce and preserve their communities.

Keywords: New Travellers, survivance, alternative worldmaking, uncertainty/certainty, human possibilities

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Introduction

The sky had clouded over grey, the light evening chill a relief at the end of this late summer day. The sun had still been strong enough to burn my skin as I'd sat exposed to it on the dry, yellow grass of the festival, socialising, minding people's children and taking photographs for an exhibition I was working on. I had just taken his picture, and now me and Dan[2], he still in his cowboy hat and shades despite the dwindling light, stood looking out across the field of vans, tents, caravans and disparate larger living vehicles. Bow-top horse-drawn living waggons sporadically lined the hedge behind and ahead of us to the right where Lucy, one of their residents, was opening the gate to let a car into the festival. A few of her friends and family members sat nearby, waiting for the kettle on a small fire to boil for tea and watching for any trouble. We surveyed the scene in momentary silence. Then, spurred on by the sense that my fieldwork, like the summer evening, was coming to an end, I asked him: 'So, what do you think about these new laws then, this Policing Bill?' 'Well, that's not going to stop us', he said confidently, 'there's always *been* Travellers[3] in Britain and there will always *be* Travellers here.'

It was not the first time I had heard this kind of answer about (the then) British Home Secretary Priti Patel's 'Policing Bill' (as it was known) during my fieldwork in England and Wales, and online, between the summers of 2020 and 2022.[4] This legislation would officially criminalise trespass and, therefore, all Gypsies and Travellers in England's mobile lifestyles. Most New Travellers – the group at the centre of this study – I had heard this reply from were 'old school'. This means they had either been living on the road (or on and off the road[5]) for decades, or were from the second generation and had, therefore, been born into this community. All Travellers and Gypsies know that if the police want you off the land you are living on, more likely than not, they will get you off (Howarth 2019), regardless of the law. Those still travelling also know that since at least 2008, specialist security firms have found a legal loophole which, for a fee, enables them to evict Travellers from private land within 24 hours, with accompanying police protection standing by to 'keep the peace'.[6] Some of those I had asked this question to, or their parents and grandparents, had been deeply concerned about and protested against previous anti-Traveller legislation intended to put a stop to Travelling lifestyles in the UK, such as the Public Order Act 1987 and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 (CJPOA 1994). The Conservative Government of the time constructed the CJPOA as being targeted specifically at stopping the New Traveller mobile

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[2] All names are changed except for Punk Kath who chose to be identified by name during her interview.

[3] In the same way most other Gypsies and Travellers in the UK do, most New Travellers (particularly ones who still live a mobile lifestyle) refer to themselves as 'Travellers'. Therefore, as this group is the focus of this paper, when 'Travellers' are mentioned, unless stated otherwise, it is New Travellers I am referring to.

[4] I employed a mix of digital and in-person ethnographic methods; this was also supplemented by my having 30 years of connections to this community.

[5] As with other 'nomadic' groups across the globe, there is less of a strict dichotomy between sedentism and mobility than is often imagined by outsiders.

[6] This was how their role was described to me by a policeman during an eviction, though it transpired that what this really consisted of was ensuring Travellers were removed and did not physically retaliate. If they did, they would be arrested.

anarchist lifestyle,[7] and the raves and free festivals associated with their community, which had grown too much for the comfort of establishment figures and landowners of the time. Many of my interlocutors felt powerless; all their past concerns and protests had not stopped previous anti-Traveller legislation being introduced so what could *they* do about the new Policing Bill? Some who were still travelling said that they had survived on the road for all this time, so another new law was not going to stop them.

At the same time, they also knew, and at gatherings often commiserated with each other, that out of what was once a close community of thousands, there were very few left on the road, or indeed alive, living *that* lifestyle anymore. There were, however, new people taking to the road in the UK (and elsewhere) often termed 'van dwellers' or 'vehicle dwellers', whom some New Travellers had lived with and claimed were 'just like us'. Others, including those following the 'VanLife' phenomena online, drew a boundary between what they saw as a group of people with different norms, values and practices than themselves. With limited opportunities[8] for the new vehicle dweller generation to become part of the New Traveller community, as had happened with other new groups taking to the road over the previous 50 years, the strength of the insistence that there would 'always be Travellers' perhaps could seem incongruent. This paper will ask how this community face the future despite their situation of marginalisation and uncertainty. In doing so, I will explore whether Gerald Vizenor's (2009) conceptualisation of survivance, a term employed in Native American studies, may aid an understanding of this context.

Uncertainty

Much previous academic work has characterised Travellers, Gypsies and other marginalised people as being oriented to the present, partly due to the challenging and apparently uncertain circumstances in which they live (e.g. Day et al. 1999).[9] Indeed, all Gypsies and Travellers in the UK (and beyond) have been subject to ongoing oppression, discrimination and violence from state and society, including successive anti-Traveller legislation. This has led to these communities now experiencing widespread sedentarisation and dispersion (James 2005; The Children's Society 2010). Gypsies and Travellers also have some of the highest mortality and morbidity rates in the UK and, due to belonging to close families and communities, are consequently required to provide a high level of care to loved ones while also experiencing personal and collective grief (e.g. Howarth 2019). Nevertheless, some contemporary researchers of Gypsy and Traveller groups have started to suggest that members of such communities, rather than managing uncertainty and difficulties by focussing only on the present, in fact, do orient themselves to the *future* (Fotta 2019; Howarth 2019). For example, Martin Fotta argues that it is central to (male) Brazilian Calon Gypsies' identity to be able to

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[7] Though in fact Section 80 of the Act repealed the duty laid out in the Caravans Act 1968 requiring councils to provide sites for Romany Gypsies (Parliament UK 2004).
[8] This may be currently starting to change whereby in UK cities where there are a lot of van dwellers and New Travellers, they are being moved off the road and onto council sites together. Also, van dwellers are beginning to attend New Travellers' grassroots festivals.
[9] Exceptions to this include Okely (1983), Blasco (2001) and Stewart (2004).

exploit uncertainty within their economic practices, in order to successfully 'make the future' (Fotta 2019: 587). Furthermore, in his work with Irish Travellers in the UK, Anthony Howarth (2019) suggests that individuals from this group employ future imaginaries in order to offset present uncertainties, such as impending eviction. Given their engagement in such dynamic future-focussed activities, perhaps members of these communities would, like my interlocutors, insist that 'there will always be Travellers'. However, the histories of the groups Fotta and Howarth worked with constituted long-standing connections of culture and kinship, whereas the community my research focusses on are often (in NGO and academic circles at least) termed 'New' Travellers because they only began to form in the 1970s, as a mobile alternative to mainstream society. With this in mind, what does it mean for *them* to insist that there will 'always be Travellers'? Who are this community, and why, if so short-lived, do they seem to wish so much to preserve their group against all odds?[10] And how do they balance their personal and group marginalisation, oppression and high mortality rates, with the sense that something will remain? How do they make the future for themselves and their group in what could be viewed as a context of great adversity?

Survivance

In this regard, the concept of 'survivance' seems potentially helpful. And yet, even Gerald Vizenor, the literary theorist who developed the term for Native American studies, suggests that theories of survivance are 'elusive' (2009: 1). Hardly surprising then, that many have tried to simplify the concept. However, Vizenor strongly critiques these oversimplifications, such as Ernest Stromberg's suggestion that survivance is 'eas[y] to explain' and that it only means to 'go beyond mere survival to acknowledge the dynamic and creative nature of indigenous rhetoric' (Stromberg 2006 in Vizenor 2009: 20). Vizenor argues that this definition does not take into account the 'compound history of the word' (2009: 20). However, the two words Vizenor suggests make up this compound are not 'survival' and 'resistance'. Instead, Vizenor traces the term first through its meaning in French (survival, relic), then its outdated legal use in English (regarding rights of succession to estates) (2009: 19). Finally, he draws attention to the definition of the suffix '-ance', an action, state or condition, to elucidate the nature of the compound, 'survival' and '-ance', which he actually intended with his conceptualisation of survivance (2009: 19). Survivance for the latter, then, 'is the action, condition, quality and sentiments of the verb survive "to remain alive or in existence," to outlive, persevere' (Vizenor 2009: 19). Here Vizenor emphasises that, though 'Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories *not a mere reaction*' (my emphasis, Vizenor 2009: 1).

From this we can deduce that, beyond survival, Vizenor envisages that survivance is a practice that involves *but is not limited* to resistance. Then, we may ask, what else *does* survivance involve? What might these actions, conditions and sentiments of remaining alive

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[10] These questions are often asked about Gypsies, Travellers and the marginalised, but my point is that I am asking this in relation to the determined self-preservation of a highly marginalised and criminalised cultural group that *only recently formed*.

and in existence that Vizenor describes, be? Further, what does he mean by 'an active sense of presence', and what are the nature of survivance 'stories'? It is beyond the scope of this, largely ethnographic, paper to provide a full account of the literature pertaining to these questions (no mean feat). But I will draw out some of the main (and those which are immediately relevant to this discussion) tenets of survivance Vizenor describes in his edited volume *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2009).

Vizenor states that: 'Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of natural reason…' (2009: 11). Here, and throughout his thesis on survivance, it appears that Vizenor is arguing that native stories do not just contain scripts of oral history passed down. Instead, they provoke a way of being, Vizenor's 'sense of presence', which is passed on both through the content of stories and through the way they are told, lived and developed. This presence produces senses of both individual and communal responsibility, as well as a lack of necessity for accountability (Vizenor 2009: 18). It is also developed through non-dominant, responsible ways of being with the natural world (Vizenor 2009: 18). As well as this, Vizenor's sense of presence is a way of being that continues in spite of, but in resistance to, domination and attempted extermination (Vizenor 2009: 1). I will return to these modes of presence in the discussion later in the paper.

Making a new community

Though a few first-generation New Travellers had Romany[11] roots, and others originated from countercultural families, most were initially born into what could be loosely described as 'mainstream UK society'. Growing originally out of free festivals and various countercultural and activist movements of the 1960s and 70s, the group became a loose mobile community known (amongst other things) as 'the peace convoy' and 'New Age Travellers'. They had no formal hierarchy and created themselves as an alternative to, and sometimes in opposition with, what they perceived as problems with UK society, such as encroaching nuclear militarisation, environmental degradation, consumerism, individualism, exploitative 9-5 wage labour and a lack of autonomy over one's own life. To do so, they initially drew on such things as texts about, imaginaries of, and direct experience with, nomadic, non-western, and indigenous peoples.[12] In particular, this included Native American and South Asian groups,[13] and long-standing Gypsy and Traveller communities. These influenced such things as the style of their free festivals, modes of mobile dwellings, clothing, community-based child rearing and living, various forms of spirituality, morality and ideals, and off-grid lifestyles. There also developed an oppositional relationship between this group and the state and police. Travellers' free festivals and 'sites' (encampments where they lived) were considered by the

[11] Some New Travellers were born and raised in Romany Gypsy families, while others trace more distant ancestry, though the sum of these people are a minority of the group.
[12] This included fictional and non-fictional works; here there is also an entwined history between anthropology and New Travellers which there is, unfortunately, no space to explore here.
[13] Some of these influences were aided by the 'magic bus' trips, whereby in the 1960s and beyond the 'hippy trail' led from Western countries across land to India and Nepal either on paid tours or under people's own steam.

former to be events of public disorder and trespass, and consequently attracted high levels of state violence, surveillance and oppressive control (James 2005; James 2006; Clark 1997).

Due to this situation, by the 1990s many New Travellers had come to live by a radical anarchist principle. Part of this was the development of a new, shared way of being involving rejecting some of the norms, values and practices of mainstream society, and living within those of the New Traveller world instead. Engaging in this new way of life, based on the political ideas and other imaginaries already outlined, was initially a conscious and intentional process for group members. However, over the years, this became automatic through *engaging in the practice* of this lifestyle, largely cut off from (but also somewhat in opposition to) mainstream society. This separation was first a geographical one, through often living in out of the way rural sites, second social, by engaging in communal living with nearly exclusively other 'site people',[14] and third psychologically, by coming to consider themselves as part of a group distinct from and superior to mainstream society.[15] Here, New Traveller morals, values and practices were produced, defined and reproduced through intensively engaging in everyday life together with many others from the group, as people travelled and lived between different sites and free festivals. This cultural becoming included and was reinforced by the intense telling of, and listening to, stories about personally or vicariously known others in the group. Through this, specific norms, values, practices and relations were developed.

The future?

Returning to the time of my fieldwork, it was not only Dan, whom I'd surveyed the festival field with at the opening to this article, who expressed a sense of certainty regarding the continuation of this community. Every New Traveller whom I had asked the general question, 'So what do you think the future is [for this group]; do you think it's all going to carry on in some way?', said 'Yes' and gave me descriptions and examples of ways they thought this would be the case. Indeed, during fieldwork I saw and heard how first and subsequent generation Travellers contribute to making this collective future through socialising the children into the group's cultural ways.

One example of this was described to me when I visited Jane in 2022. She told me how it was important to her, having spent a lot of her own childhood growing up on site, to bring her daughter up the same way. Once she'd reached adulthood, she had moved out of the house she had formerly moved into with her mum, back onto the road. She and her boyfriend, whose parents had also lived on the road, had found it difficult to find space on any sites near to where they had lived and worked. So, together with their young daughter, they had parked up in their truck on their own, getting moved on as and when local authorities and landowners saw fit. When I went to visit Jane, now a lone parent, she was still in her truck renting a space on private land. She described to me how, despite the lack of sites and, therefore, the opportunity for her daughter to be raised in a communal way with other children as she had been as a child, she took every opportunity to go to grassroots parties and festivals. This was

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[14] This is one of the ways New Travellers refer to themselves and is a term specific to their group only.
[15] As is the case with many mobile (and perhaps other) groups.

because they provided the opportunity for her daughter to experience, even if only for a few days at a time, having that sense of freedom and communality from being part of the New Traveller 'family'. Jane described how she had recently been to one such event; though she knew in advance it was coming up, she had not felt the necessity to arrange to go with someone or ask any friends if they would also be attending. Jane said this was because she already knew there would be old friends and close people there, someone they would be able to camp with. Though it wasn't certain who she would see, there was a sense that that didn't matter – whoever she bumped into the experience would be the same; it would be a space in which the future she desired for her daughter and her community could be made through her socialisation into New Traveller cultural ways.

Socialising 'the kids'

Earlier that year, I had been at a festival with some other second-generation Travellers who were taking the opportunity to catch up with friends and family and provide a similar socialisation experience for their children to that which Jane had described. Sitting on a camping chair with a friend's two-week old baby snuggled inside my jacket, I was surrounded by a circle of laughing and talking faces illuminated by firelight in the otherwise thick darkness of the spring Beltane festival's night. My attention was drawn to the two toddlers playing together in a lamplit caravan next to me. The smallest had a large kitchen knife which he gleefully brandished as the two of them chattered and played together. Swiftly jumping up, with a kind but firm demeanour, I removed the object from the infant's grasp and placed it above his reach. Both of this child's parents were present, in the sense that their caravan was only a few metres away. They were either chatting by the fire, standing next to the caravan where the children played, or making quick trips back to their own caravan a few metres away to socialise with friends. After all, their caravan door was open and for New Travellers the living space, here consisting of the inside of all their vehicles and the space in between and around, is considered to a large degree as shared and the children inhabiting it the responsibility of all present. In this milieu this was perfectly usual; there were plenty of us sitting by the fire next to where the children played to watch out for them, as indeed I had done.

When Bessie, the mother of the child, next returned to her spot by the trailer, I relayed to her what had just occurred. Rather than being concerned, though there was a degree of comical performative frustration with the child's antics, the overarching tone was that of pride:

> Oh yeah, he's always after knives, the bigger the better, give him toys to play with and he doesn't want them. You can hide them but then you look back, and he always has them again!

Later, after it had been dark for some time Helen, a girl of around ten years old, appeared in the circle around the fire. 'Look how much I've made reading palms!' she said, showing off a

handful of pound coins. She was a third-generation New Traveller, known to most people present. There were cries of 'well done' and 'come and read mine' from those sat around the fire. She eagerly plied open the fingers of the nearest potential customer, her own small, agile fingers tracing the furrowed lines of their larger, more life-worn hand. Speaking quickly, she gave them her summary of their future before receiving the golden coin in payment for her services. Her customer, a second-generation Traveller who would have grown up engaging in similar activities at festivals themselves, nodded in approval that 'the kids'[16] were still keeping up the traditions. For New Travellers, house dwellers - including (or perhaps especially) festival and rave 'punters'[17]- were considered 'fair game' as a potential source of money. The kids traditionally found multifarious ways to get money from these people, including selling jokes, selling rocks, temporary tattoos, glowsticks, homemade cakes, and drinks. In this regard, it was not palm reading that was a tradition in itself, it was independently initiating ways to make money. This likely began as children's emulation of adults at festivals supplying goods and services to those who had come to the countryside to party, bringing little except money to spend. As with other occupations the adults engaged in, children were encouraged, and wanted, to follow suit. But it is not just punters who buy from the kids, adult New Travellers will encourage youngsters from their own community who are engaging in money-making activities, by buying things from them if they can (as long as they do not push too far with their demands).

I saw Bessie again a few months later, at the late summer festival referred to at the opening of this paper. I was again helping to look after one of the third-generation Traveller babies, this time a six-month-old. Bessie and her friend, another second-generation New Traveller mother, Hazel, were at this gathering without their own children. While we looked after the six-month-old together, Hazel was talking about a time she had tried out living in housing with her non-Traveller boyfriend. Having lived with other Travellers all her life, this had not gone well, and she had chosen to move back onto site where there would 'always be someone there if you needed them', something she had apparently not been able to live without. But now, as a mother herself, there also seemed to be an unspoken issue hanging over our conversation. Voicing it, she turned to Rose, a teenager who was there with her mother though they now lived in housing. 'Have you ever lived on site?' 'Yes.' 'Which do you prefer [living in a house or on site]?' Rose proceeded to succinctly outline what she saw as the plusses and minuses of both. Amused on hearing her daughter reflecting on the experiences of her younger, feral self, Rose's mother, Sandra, interjected in the same vein of feigned comical frustration Bessie had used when speaking of her toddler's desire to play with knives, back in May:

> When we moved out of a vehicle, Rose wasn't 'house trained': the first thing
> she did when we moved into our new place was to turn all the taps on and
> flood the bathroom, then she messed with all the heating switches. It seemed

[16] 'The kids' or 'site kids' are terms New Travellers use to refer to children who have grown up living on site. Because of their practices of close living all who have shared sites with them are their 'aunties' and 'uncles', and because they constitute a generation raised within this culture, these children are considered to be very special.
[17] In this community this is used as a derogatory term which distinguishes attendees at raves and festivals from Travellers and others who stage these events.

like she'd broken them, and I thought: 'Oh my God what have I done moving in *here* with *her*!'

Hazel looked approvingly at Rose, and said to her: 'Ah yeah, well done!' And, to me,

> Kids these days are over protected, they can't do anything... I let my little one cut wood with a saw because that's all he wants to do: some people wouldn't agree with it but I'm around keeping an eye on him!

Bessie joined in at this point, proudly adding:

> Yeah, we bought Jonny [the toddler whom I had taken the knife off back at the Beltane festival] a mini set of real tools because he doesn't want the toy version either.

Certainly, children's use of tools and woodcutting implements aligned with the desire of their parents for them to be socialised into New Traveller 'ways'. Here, as with finding ways to generate money, the skills needed to fix one's vehicles (essential knowledge for a mobile community) and use woodcutting tools (where wood burners and fires were used for heat and sometimes cooking, and money could be made by selling chainsaw carvings) were highly valued. In this sense, they would be passed onto the next generation in order for them to become part of the group, and for the group itself to continue to be remade through the ability to undertake these essential practices. But I suggest it is not simply the passing on of this kind of skill itself that is at issue here, it is also that there is a cultural norm for this group that this can and should be learnt by children at a young age, that is significant for exploration. This could partly be down to New Travellers, being such a new group, explicitly encouraging their children to learn particular cultural ways in order to distinguish themselves from mainstream society, due to its proximity to them. However, long standing mobile groups of the UK, such as Irish Travellers and Romany Gypsies, also share a similar attitude to children's engagement with adult activities and tool use (Howarth 2019). This norm, in some senses, registers a different kind of division between adulthood and childhood than that generally found in what these communities respectively describe as 'country people' and 'Gorgios' ('straight people' for New Travellers), meaning non-Travellers.

There may be different reasons and practices associated with this norm for New Travellers in comparison to other Traveller groups. However, all Gypsy and Traveller groups share the experience of having limited state protection. In fact, as aforementioned, the state has instead itself been a source of physical violence and oppression toward these communities. In this sense, New (and other) Travellers have to prepare themselves and their children to be ready for violence and other altercations at the hands of police, farmers and landowners, members of the public, and other Travellers and Gypsies from inside and outside their own communities. This is part of everyday life and may itself partly explain the expectation for earlier child maturity. Perhaps then, for New Travellers at least (I cannot comment on the context of other Gypsies and Travellers in this regard), uncertainty stemming from potential threats of violence is ameliorated by encouraging early maturation and autonomy through the

development of a sense of independence, resilience and adult-style skills. This independence, however, is undergirded by the knowledge that other members of the community will come to your aid when needed.

The effects of this style of socialisation were demonstrated to me when talking with second-generation New Traveller Meg. Now in her mid-twenties, she had moved into housing as a child. However, she had continued being socialised within the New Traveller socio-cultural sphere in everyday family life and with extended family and friends, as well as during summer travelling and at festivals. This had apparently shaped her experiences of and responses to contemporary situations, including when the Covid-19 pandemic hit while she was living in shared housing with 'straight' friends. She described to me how she had been surprised that they seemed so fearful and that, to ameliorate this, they had taken comfort in strictly following the guidance outlined by the government. She compared this to how she herself had felt little need for concern, saying she had considered news programming and government guidelines of the time as untrustworthy population control and scare tactics. Certainly, many marginalised communities had good reason to be dismissive of government guidelines, due to histories of unwanted and harmful public health interventions. Although this was not the historical experience for this group, children who had grown up on New Traveller sites in the 1990s, such as Meg, had experienced evictions, violence, surveillance, and conspiratorial operations enacted on them by the state (e.g. James 2005; Clark 1997). But this was not just a sense of resilience through living without the protection of the state. As with many marginalised communities, New Travellers seemed to have a sense that their group, and therefore themselves, had unlimited powers of endurance against all odds. In this regard, Meg had told me she had known that *whatever happened she would be ok*; that there would be some way through the situation.

But how to conceptualise this sense of certainty without reverting to a simple interpretation of the emic perspective being different from the 'objective', etic, structural context of this situation? How should we avoid belying New Travellers' own modes of producing a sense of certainty by falling back into a construction of them as 'actually' living in a constant state of uncertainty? And how can we conceptually balance their sense of infallibility and survivability, with the destruction of their community through intentional state tactics and high rates of morbidity and mortality? To respond to this situation, I will now explore how New Travellers personally and collectively mediated death.

Endurance beyond death?

Despite the apparent sense of certainty New Travellers have that they will 'always be', the older generation are acutely aware of, and often commiserate with each other about, their high rates of mortality and morbidity. As well as the more overt physical threats and oppression already referred to, slower kinds of violence and other effects of marginalisation such as poverty, lack of access to healthcare and other resources, as well as, significantly, mental health and addiction issues, have a significant impact on many people in this community.

As in the squats and council estates of inner cities, the late 1980s and the 1990s saw an epidemic on New Traveller sites of sudden, early deaths by overdose, as heroin flooded the UK. However, nowadays more common causes of early demise for older New Travellers are organ failure, cancer and other deaths associated with chronic alcohol and substance use, often undiagnosed (New Travellers cannot, or do not, always access health services). Consequently, this is experienced by those around them as a sudden, unexpected death, traumatising those they currently live on site with, as well as adding to the already high burden of collective grief experienced by the wider community, many of whom the deceased may have lived with or otherwise been close to over the decades. Every long-term New Traveller who passes on is felt as a deep loss by those that knew them, as well as those who only knew *of* them: all are entwined together by stories, chosen and blood family connections, and through many intense shared utopian and dystopian experiences. The loss of their life, and the experiences and memories they carried with them, are collectively mourned on social media and at funerals and wakes, as well as in stories, dreams and memories for as long as there are people who remember them, or the stories of their escapades.

The last few decades of the 20th century, particularly before the mid-1990s when free festivals and rave parties hosted by the community were outlawed, are a particularly important time for older New Travellers and there is a concern for this generation that the memory of it will be forgotten and lost. When talking to people who lived on the road during that time, they said such things as: 'It was the best time of my life', 'It made me who I am', but also, commonly, 'If I hadn't left [site], I'd be dead by now.' There are certainly also those, often known as 'together'[18] Travellers, some of whom still live in vehicles (often on permanent sites or their own land) who did not succumb to addiction. In this sense, for many New Travellers everyday life is based around work and family – albeit that this is embedded within their broader cultural milieu and punctuated by festivals and other community events. But there are also those (mainly of the older generation), now disparately scattered in housing and on sites about the country, or living an austere mobile existence, who are afflicted by chronic addiction, grief and loneliness. Many of these people have physical and mental health issues and, subject to constant news of the deaths of close people, reflect on their own mortality.

During my fieldwork, John often talked to me at length about recent deaths of close friends from site. He had taken to drinking vodka, though he said he had beaten his long-term heroin addiction; after all, alcohol had always been his 'poison'. When in the zone of grief, he would reminisce and if dead friends were mentioned he would break down suddenly into tears. But almost as instantly, the subject would be left aside again: on to the next story of the past or gossip about what is happening in the lives of New Traveller friends today. The tears were gone as quickly as they came. On one of these occasions, a mutual friend, Tommy, who had also been part of this world but now had his own business, unable to sit by watching another of his close friends 'killing himself' in front of his eyes, told John: 'It'll be you next if

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[18] This denotes people from the community that led comparatively less chaotic lives, and/or perhaps were able to access or generate greater resources for sustaining themselves. However, divisions of this kind between subgroups are not always as strict as they seem; someone who starts out being 'together' may change habits of life and vice versa.

you don't stop.' Flexing his arms as he stretched them up towards the ceiling, inviting all present to judge his distance from death, John replied: 'No, I'm fit and healthy, look at all the muscle on me from living on the road.' 'Yeah, but what about inside there', Tommy replied, gesturing towards John's torso and the organs, damaged from years of abuse, he insinuated were inside. 'Well, no... I'm tough you know!' the latter wavered. But it seemed Tommy had decided the time had come for some 'straight talk':

> Well, I've lost too many and I don't want to lose you too, so if you want to stay alive you should stop drinking vodka and [Special] Brew.

This is a common kind of exchange between those with long term addictions from this community, and their loved ones. There are also people in this community who, though having comparatively moderated their intake of harmful substances, are still cognisant that much internal damage has likely already been done. Watching as the last of their now few peers from their heyday die around them, they, like John, assess their own still living bodies, and estimate how much time they may have left. One man who had 'cut down' for the sake of his children told me he is aiming to 'last 'til I'm 60'. Sixty was an old age for a long-term New Traveller who still continued to live a mobile lifestyle over many decades, or on long term unauthorised sites, or who did not 'come off' drugs and alcohol in their earlier years.

After life?

Though early on in the life of their community some New Travellers dabbled in (New Age) Christianity, and many older and newer members of the group observe the cycle of the seasons and/or identify as adhering to other forms of spirituality, many are against organised Christian religion (viewed as an oppressive institution). An example of expressions of this were loud vocal complaints at funerals where the deceased's name is associated with a Christian God or afterlife: shouts that 'He/She wasn't religious!' would be heard.[19] So, does this mean they face all of this death with nothing beyond?

When long term New Travellers, especially of the older age group, talk about the death of someone from the community, they often state they will see them again at the party[20] or festival 'in the sky'. This refers to a kind of collective utopian imaginary in which all deceased New Travellers are together partying on into eternity. In some senses it bears similarities to 'Mary's dream': the future desired imaginary of one of Howarth's (2019) Irish Traveller interlocutors. This latter, though about life on *this* plane, also featured aspects of a longed for but now gone past. In it, her intergenerational family would be able to live within their own cultural and moral sphere, untarnished by the concerns and dangers of the world of 'country people'[21] that were so negatively impacting herself and her family in the present. For my

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[19] As in Okely's (1983) work on Romany Gypsies, New Travellers transformed the spaces and rites of Gorgio/straight funerals, cemeteries and churches to meet their own cultural beliefs and requirements.
[20] A term for an illegal rave.
[21] An Irish Traveller term for house dwellers.

interlocutors, the party in the sky is somewhat similar. It is a place unaffected by the reach of consecutive UK government legislation that all but outlawed New Travellers' free festivals and parties, and their lifestyle in general. Here they would be able to be together again as a cultural group, and there would no longer be the threat of early demise from the effects of drink, drugs and alienation.

In a way again similar to Mary's dream (Howarth 2019), those conjuring up the image of the party in the sky do so using elements of a desired but lost cultural past (albeit that this culture only dates back to the 1970s, rather than for centuries as Mary's does). As mentioned, this was a heyday for this generation of New Travellers. Thousands of them lived on sites around the UK, free festivals and raves were hosted and attended throughout the summer, money was to be made from punters, and there were enough people on the road with the will to push back against local police force's attempts to control and contain them. But it is also different. In Mary's case, though circumstances seemed levelled against her wish to have a field somewhere away from country people, this was not completely out of the question (for reasons I won't go into here, despite being threatened with eviction her family did have prospects to be able to remain together, their primary cause of concern). But for what we have already established as being a non-monotheistic community, New Travellers' apparent collective focus towards a utopian afterlife fashioned on their previous lifestyle, may seem more like living in the past than bringing the past forward into the future-present as a means to offset uncertainty, as Howarth suggests Mary is doing in *her* imaginary. Where Mary's dream could be seen as a way to instigate hope in the face of crisis, New Travellers' party in the sky seemingly amounts only to cruel optimism (Berlant 2011). However, I suggest the party in the sky could be seen as a kind of story through which New Travellers retain their sense of certainty regarding their shared future, by portraying themselves as always finding a way to endure. The centrality of stories in shaping and reproducing the New Traveller world will now be further explored.

New Traveller stories

New Travellers often discussed the necessity for someone to record all their stories so that they do not get lost in time. A lot of these are tales about defying and outwitting the police. This was because, from the early 1970s the state via police forces had used disproportionately violent tactics to evict New Travellers' festivals and sites, as well as employing targeted interventions and surveillance to monitor, control and disband the group. Respondents suggested that to begin with they had responded non-violently, continuing to attend festivals and live on public land regardless of attempts to discourage this way of life. However, Travellers suggest that the early 1980s saw Margaret Thatcher's government using the same tactics, and sometimes even the same special police forces, they used to break the miners' strikes, to attempt to destroy their community. During this period, particularly violent and therefore memorable events for the group occurred. These included such things as gangs of unprovoked police beating Travellers trying to access Stonehenge festival in 1985 with truncheons, leaving them screaming and bloody, then destroying and confiscating their homes

and arresting all adults present. There were also other incidences of unprovoked violence and mass arrests, and stories of New Travellers' children being taken temporarily into care and their dogs being destroyed on such occasions. Such events are renowned inside the community. As well as the incident at Stonehenge, which New Travellers term 'The Beanfield' (abbreviated from 'The Battle of the Beanfield' as it was called in the press), two more of these significant events are known as 'Stoney Cross' and 'Nostell Priory' after the sites where they took place. All long-term New Travellers (whether they were present or not) have heard and passed on stories of these events. These are not just chilling tales about what was meted out by the police, but also often ones told with bravado, of the ways individual Travellers and the group in general showed defiance and resilience regardless of state actions against them. In these, police are constructed as cowards, only able to overpower them due to their far greater numbers. For example, one Traveller who was at Nostell Priory and The Beanfield described them sneeringly as 'petty' for 'pouring all the sticky things from our cupboards into all our stuff' when they had confiscated their homes. In one instance in the early 1980s, Travellers made homeless at one of these events through mass vehicle confiscation were offered sanctuary at Glastonbury Festival by its founder and landowner Michael Eavis. This cemented a sometimes turbulent relationship between himself and New Travellers. It also made Glastonbury festival a kind of home for them, whereby it still offers the chance for many to come together, to party, and to work, as they continue to provide large sectors of the infrastructure and entertainment for the event.

In this sense, these violent incidences were shaped by and shaped the New Traveller world, as well as the stories it told about itself, which in turn acted as historical and moral exemplars of who they were and where they came from. These events also affected how the community responded to the police from then on, whereby some rebuilt their broken homes as 'battle buses' – reinforced with metal sheets and bars over windows, and grills over bumpers. From this time onwards there was much conflict between New Travellers and the British State, until their numbers dissipated following the implementation of the Criminal Justice and Public order Act 1994. At gatherings, stories continue to centre on how New Travellers outwitted, resisted or sometimes managed to overpower the police during those years:

> Remember when X got chased back to site by the pigs and he rolled in mud and lay under a log, so even when they brought out their dogs and heat-seeking helicopter they didn't detect him there!

> I was at the front of the convoy when hundreds of us stopped on the M4 and blocked it with our vehicles because they wouldn't let us off the motorway to go to Avon free festival.

There were also the many stories of group members using their vehicles to break through police barricades, which were used regularly throughout the 1980s and 90s to stop New Travellers moving between counties and accessing their festival sites. As well as facing off police, continuing to exist as a group throughout this context also necessitated sticking together and helping each other. Though there was no group hierarchy or formal structure,

there were respected characters made infamous through stories. These would be those who could both 'lead a convoy' but also who 'would not leave anyone behind' (i.e. they would fix or tow the vehicles of those who were not able to move under their own steam when eviction struck).

Some Travellers who told the old stories also reproduced a narrative about their own potential early demise and of that of beloved others who had 'left too soon'. This is that, despite everything, it was 'worth it'. For example, one grieving man stated he himself had 'lived so much' that he didn't mind dying, and that he took solace that his many departed friends had experienced exceptional lives of freedom. However, it is hardly surprising there is ambiguity with this; he also expressed gratitude that he and others were 'still here'. It seems then that collective grief is coupled with an insistence that living through – and making – those times was so intense, real and free, that it mattered more to have been part of it than to even have stayed alive to tell the tale *as long as there are others left to tell yours*. For some, then, it seems that a short life as a Traveller is worth more than a longer one outside of this community. It is the intensity, perhaps, – how *much* and how fully you were able to live life – that mattered. Therefore, maybe, uncertainty about future survival is offset by the sense of certainty that oneself and one's community have lived a life as full and free as it gets.

But I suggest that it is not just the sense that oneself and one's 'family' have lived a full and free life that makes individual death less problematic. Through all this, it seems there is a sense of something new having been made by those living this lifestyle through those times, that remains and that needs to be protected and passed on. Partly, perhaps, this elusive phenomenon is a particular 'New Traveller' attitude, outlook and way of being, developed through their novel relations with the environment, the state and each other. As we have seen, it is also a certain set of norms, values and practices, or New Traveller cultural ways, that are part of this.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, all New Travellers I asked about the future of the group expressed certainty that it would continue. However, when pressed, unsurprisingly it was often difficult for them to say what exactly would remain now that they had been sedentarised by successive rounds of anti-Traveller legislation. Of course, there were those with children and grandchildren, who felt that whether they were in housing or not, they were joined together by the memories of 'playing in puddles together on sites' (denoting togetherness and freedom) when they were infants. Others I
spoke to about the form of this 'New Traveller-ness' and how it would endure, called it 'anarchy'. Punk Kath,[22] infamous in the New Traveller and associated alternative communities, described it to me as a sense that 'there will always be something out there', and that 'they won't be able to iron out all the square pegs that don't fit into the round holes', seemingly placing the New Traveller phenomenon into a kind of abstract history of resistance against domination, stretching both into the past and future. What is seen as, and intended to, endure, then, includes a kind of latent freedom and resistance, perhaps an alter-ness. This could be compared in some ways to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987[1980]) notion of energy, an ever-present potential opposition to state forces.

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[22] It was common for people in this group to acquire prefixes, to distinguish them from the hundreds of others in the community who may have the same forename.

Survivance?

To think conceptually about New Travellers, and their modes of endurance and orientations to the future, we will return to the question as to whether and how the notion of survivance may aid an understanding of how new groups survive the uncertain. As we have already heard, theories of survivance are elusive, and the term is consequently interpreted in varying ways by different writers. But does it hold potential for understanding the New Traveller case?

To answer, I will first return to Vizenor's privileging of stories as 'sources of survivance' (2009: 11). As already discussed, throughout his thesis on survivance, it appears that Vizenor is arguing that the content and style of Native stories promote a way of being or 'sense of presence' which in turn shapes their practices of survivance. We have seen that stories are also central for the New Traveller community. I have suggested that the way Travellers position themselves and each other in such stories, shapes the way they mediate and ameliorate potential risk and uncertainty. For example, the stories mothers proudly tell about their children's wildness and desire to learn adult skills, shapes and reinforces such norms and practices of child rearing. This, then, enables the kids to experience freedom from accountability in the form of discipline, which in turn, teaches them to be responsible for themselves. However, as we have also heard, young children and new people first joining the group also learn the norm of taking responsibility for each other through the stories and experiences of oppression and eviction, where it is necessary to pull together to endure. As seen through Hazel's experience of trying to move away from site, this shared responsibility is balanced with shared care whereby in everyday life there is always the sense someone will be there if you need them. Often living rurally in converted trucks, buses and caravans, with only a thin sheet of steel or aluminium between themselves and the elements, New Travellers take pride in their resilience to live with their environment. In this regard, wood burning stoves are usually their only heat source and, therefore, a central piece of their material culture, hence Hazel's pride and supportiveness for her son's incessant desire to emulate the adults and learn to saw wood.

These New Traveller modes of being could then relate in some ways to Vizenor's senses of presence described earlier in this paper. For example, their norms of individual responsibility and lack of accountability, as well as how this is balanced with communal responsibility, reflect those described by Vizenor in his account of survivance. The ways New Traveller stories mediate and reproduce these norms, as well as how they live with – rather than dominate and objectify – the natural world also bears some resemblances to Vizenor's practices of survivance.

The concept of survivance does help us make sense of New Traveller practices then. However, we should remember that Vizenor's development of the idea was within the context of Native American studies. By contrast, my subject here is a contemporary Western group. New Travellers' stories are not passed down from ancient ancestors within an indigenous cosmology. Instead, this group exists between a disappearing lifestyle and a burgeoning culture. They are Travellers who are largely no longer mobile, and do not have a

very long or widely recognised history of culture and kinship. Not quite an ethnic group, but more than a subculture, they differ from 'traditional' Gypsies and Travellers but have four generations of social and biological reproduction: they are very much alive, but with many dead. In this sense, although New Travellers' cultural continuity is set against a background of oppression and existential threat, the term survivance has become synonymous with the experience of Native American groups who have suffered genocide at the hands of colonial settlers. Is it, then, respectful and appropriate to extend this term to this non-indigenous group?

Alternative worldmaking

Due to New Travellers' somewhat liminal status – being between a subculture and an ethnic group – rather than too ready an assimilation of their case to Vizenor's account of survivance then, perhaps Elizabeth Povinelli's notion of alternative worlds (2011) could be a helpful complement for an understanding of their context. I suggest this because Povinelli employs the concept to explore the experiences of both indigenous and new groups, such as new anarchists, new animists and the precariat. Because of their inhabitants' inability, or refusal, to be fully co-opted within neoliberal states, Povinelli suggests such worlds hold potential for new forms of social life (Povinelli 2011: 9).

Here, Povinelli built on Foucault's (1984) concept of heterotopias to describe these spaces of difference within contemporary states. Foucault described these as constituting a 'simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space' of mainstream society (Foucault 1984: 50). This reflects how New Travellers' imaginaries of, and ways of engaging with, the land their sites were on – as temporary dwelling places for their mobile community – differed from the state's perception of this as squatting illegally within a privatised landscape. As we have seen, this has meant their sites and festivals were not only places to live but were battle grounds on which New Travellers' relations to the land, the state, and each other were shaped and contested.

Povinelli suggests she is interested in the nature of the contexts in which new kinds of life and new forms of politics can emerge and be 'thought' (Povinelli 2011: 9-10). However, uncertain as to the potential for the success of new alternative worlds, she asks:

> How can new forms of life, let alone the political thought they might foster, persevere… How can new social worlds endure the 'wavering of death' that defines the[m]? (ibid)

Unconvinced of the likelihood of 'new life surviving in these spaces', Povinelli even goes so far as to describe instances of such as moments of 'miraculization' (ibid).

With this in mind, can Povinelli's conceptualisation of new alternative worlds aid an understanding of New Travellers' ways of dealing with uncertainty, given her own doubt as to the likelihood of such groups' survival? In answer, I argue this paper has already extended Povinelli's work by providing an ethnographic account of a new alternative world which has

endured over four generations. Therefore, how could Povinelli's concept be adapted to the context of this new but enduring alternative world? What could be done to enable this to become a framework through which to explore how such communities mediate their marginalisation and look to the future; how they at the same time form and preserve their worlds? In answer, rather than the static concept of 'new alternative worlds' (which Povinelli constructs as conceptual future imaginaries that in the actual contemporary world are destined for failure), I propose instead the concept of 'alternative worldmaking'. The notion of alternative worldmaking, I suggest, is more able to capture the dynamic processes of both producing and reproducing such new communities, including how their novel norms, values, and practices – their ways of being – develop and endure.

Conclusion

This paper has explored New Travellers' orientations to the future in what seems from the outside to be their context of uncertainty regarding individual and cultural endurance. I have argued that, through particular forms of child socialisation, the telling of stories, and by constructing the imaginary of the 'party in the sky', they were able to produce and reproduce a sense of certainty regarding the continuation of their world.

I explored whether these processes could be seen as similar to some of the practices of survivance described by Vizenor (2009). Although there were indeed many parallels, because this was a term developed as a framework to capture the experiences of indigenous groups who had been subject to settler colonialism and genocide, it seemed less appropriate to employ this to conceptualise the lives of a new group formed in a contemporary Western context. Instead, I suggested the New Traveller community might better be understood as one of Elizabeth Povinelli's new alternative worlds (Povinelli 2011). However, I argued that the static nature of the concept did not fit the case in hand. Therefore, I proposed the more active term 'alternative worldmaking' through which to better explore the processes of producing and reproducing a new alternative world.

Due to the domination and reach of global neoliberalism and the nation state model, it is not just Povinelli but the wider milieu of anthropology that is uncertain about the possible success of new alternative cultural forms. Such worlds are usually conceptualised as a future *potential* (e.g. Graeber 2004; Weston 2021) or only of the past (Scott 2009). Therefore, this paper provides a novel case through exploring the development and nature of the norms, practices and values of a new alternative community, recently formed within a contemporary Western nation state but having continued over four generations. In doing so, I reposition the temporal lens by conceptualising such a world as *already having begun* and *already having endured*. My research with this self-created, mobile, anarchist, off-grid community also constitutes a unique exploration into what alternative socio-cultural forms could look like beyond a cultural collapse of liberal capitalism, and within the changing environmental conditions of the Anthropocene. In this sense, the paper, and my conceptualisation of alternative worldmaking, provides a framework through which to help explore pressing anthropological issues regarding human possibilities (Graeber 2007).

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THE LOTTERY OF LIFE: PRACTICES OF SURVIVANCE, FUTURE ORIENTATIONS AND EVERYDAY NEWS ROUTINES IN THE DUTCH CARIBBEAN

SANNE ROTMEIJER[1]

This paper explores how practices of survivance (Vizenor 2008) might be conceptualized according to the localities and temporalities expressed through everyday news routines on Curaçao, a Dutch Caribbean island. I do so by taking an anthropological approach to news (understood as a social practice of turning events into collective stories) with a focus on future 'orientations' (Bryant and Knight 2019). Building on fieldwork on Curaçao in 2015-16, I focus on how Curaçaoans act upon persistent uncertainty through future-oriented news routines. In the case I present in this paper, this means practicing news in the hope for a better future via games of chance (lottery) and with faith in a future that is inevitable (obituaries). These future orientations are open-ended. While hope speaks to an unknown future that is desired, faith speaks to the immanence of an inevitable future full of chance. Whereas institutional actors (in politics, business, media) on the island and in the Dutch world orientate toward mitigating uncertainty and anticipating risk – also, at times, in relation to capitalizing on desires and hopes – I show that everyday news routines around the lottery (of life) also show how Curaçaoans, especially those marginalized and without access to the institutional public, creatively navigate uncertainty by embracing chance. This future-oriented mode of being, or becoming, articulates tactics of survivance whereby an active presence takes shape in the contingency of everyday life.

Keywords: survivance, future orientations, chance, news, Caribbean

Introduction

In this paper, I explore how survivance might be conceptualized according to the localities and temporalities expressed through everyday news routines on Curaçao, a Dutch Caribbean

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island. Building on the ethnographic research I did on the meaning and function of news (media) practices as a marker and generator of sociality on this island in 2015-16 (Rotmeijer 2023), I focus on how Curaçaoans navigate persistent uncertainty by orienting themselves towards the future. In the case I present in this paper, this means seeking a better future via winning the lottery. Before turning to this case, let me elaborate on how I understand the notion of survivance in the context of the (Dutch) Caribbean, and its practices in relation to news routines on the island of Curaçao.

Following Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor, who coined the term in the context of Native American Studies, I understand survivance as an 'active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry' (1998: vii). The latter is also at stake in the Caribbean, which since European colonialism, has unfolded as 'a space of unsettledness, of conquest, of forced exile, of unhomeliness' (Hall 2015: 18). At the same time indigenous peoples in the region faced genocide, enslaved peoples found themselves in the Middle Passage – 'a zone of non-being' (Glissant 1997). For Glissant it was this 'non-being', this abyss, from where a renewal of being, or better, constantly *becoming* Caribbean emerged. He called this creolization (*créolisation*), which was not about 'intermixing *per se,* but a relating that creates an "unpredictable," "radically new dimension of reality"' (Glissant 1995: 270, in Burns 1999: 112).

In their recent work, Pugh and Chandler built on Glissant's theorizing from the Caribbean, in 'rearticulating the world as abyss', which 'foregrounds the foundational violence of Indigenous dispossession, chattel slavery and the Middle Passage via the assembling of a figurative position without ontological security' (2023: 24). Such a position, they argue, is enacted through 'abyssal modes of practice of survival and of resistance; an aesthetics where differences are held together through an alternative sense of the universal which emerges against differentiation, where differences are held together in play' (ibid: 29-30). Here, I see how such abyssal modes of practices may relate to an aesthetics of survivance, as an 'active sense of singular presence', or a poetics of Relation, whereby Glissant's goal was 'to generate a discourse which does not retrace the linear paths of colonial oppression, but rather traces an alternate vision of transformation' (Murdoch 2015: 24).

Practices of survivance – of survival and resistance, of endurance and vitality – enact presence and absence through storying new realities. The latter is what Vizenor's description of the survivance practices of his grandmother, Alice, evokes:

> My grandmother was anishinaabe by ancestors, a native presence, by reservation experience, and she was an indian by absence, an emigrant in the city. She endured many seasons of extreme poverty, winters over tricky stories, but she never lost her soul to victimry. (…) Alice told newsy stories of survivance in the city. She must have been wary of reservation men and their promises of traditions. Yet, she teased chance and created a new native 'giveaway' of survivance in the city. (2008: 20)

In a similar fashion, I encountered practices of 'newsy stories of survivance' during the ethnographic research I did on the meaning and function of news (media) practices as a marker

and generator of sociality in Curaçao. During my first week of participant observation at one of the newspapers' newsrooms on this island, it soon became apparent to me that 'news' – as a social-cultural practice – goes beyond what people normally associate with 'the news' – the world of the news media and their output. News outlets on Curaçao are prominent yet not exclusive mediators of 'newly received or noteworthy information, especially about recent or important events' (Oxford Languages n.d.). I noticed how ordinary Curaçaoans created, disseminated, and consumed 'newsy stories of survivance' in daily life: often in parallel, yet closely related to the institutional public realm. Before turning to these popular practices of newsmaking, first a brief description of the political and social-economic context of the island of Curaçao.

Curaçao is a Dutch Caribbean island that forms – together with five other islands throughout the Caribbean Sea – part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. These islands share a past of Dutch colonialism that translates into a present of closely interwoven inter-personal, political, economic, and monetary relations as well as ongoing ties with the Netherlands. This is particularly the case for Curaçao, which is the biggest island of the Dutch Caribbean [see Figure 1] and located just sixty kilometres from the northern coast of Venezuela. Since Dutch colonialism in 1634, Curaçao has been a contested strategic trade hub and the centre for Dutch colonial governance in the region. After colonial neglect for over a century, Curaçao's economic upheaval came with the establishment of the *Isla* oil refinery by the Anglo-Dutch multinational Royal Dutch Shell in 1915. The refinery soon became one of the world's largest, causing rapid industrialization that, in turn, attracted labourers from all over the world. When Shell left in 1985, the island's offshore financial sector peaked – having grown since World War II, when many Dutch corporations moved to Curaçao to avoid German confiscation. Due to global economic changes and new tax policies within the Kingdom of the Netherlands from the 1990s, offshore industry was transformed into a flourishing e-gaming sector (more on this below, also in relation to lotteries). Tourism is another important pillar of the island's economy, although it is still small compared to other (Dutch) Caribbean islands.
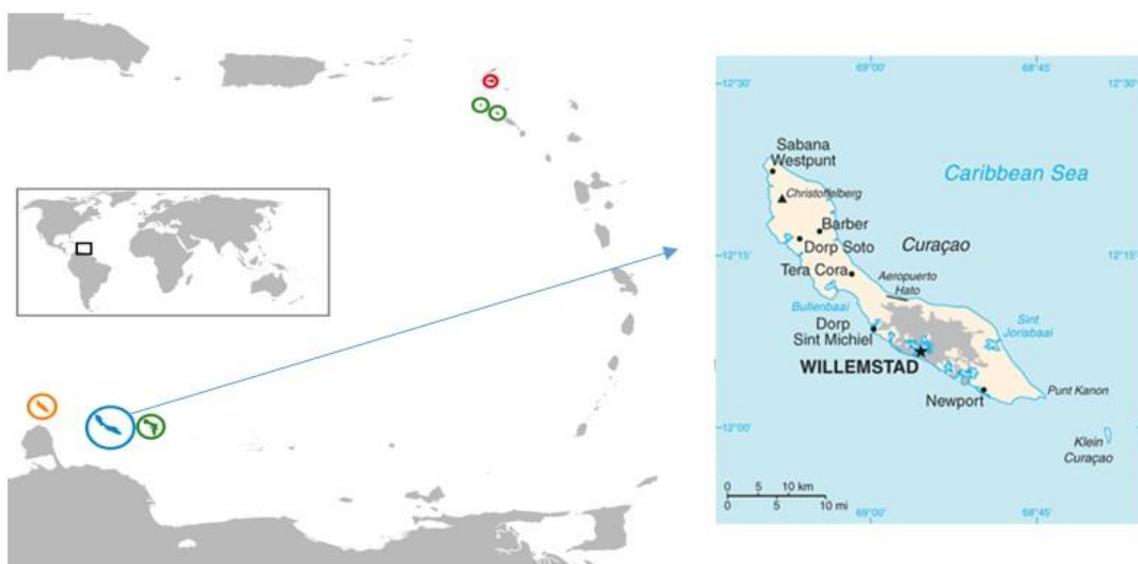

Figure 1 – Map of the Dutch Caribbean and Curaçao. Source: Wikipedia (adjusted by author).

Today, the island population comprises more than 100 nationalities. Curaçao's official languages are Dutch and, since 2007, Papiamentu and English, while Spanish is also widely spoken. Papiamentu, a Spanish/Portuguese-based creole with elements from West-African languages, Dutch and English, is most widely spoken on the island. This is also reflected in the island's bursting media landscape. In 2016, there were 28 licensed radio stations, 8 newspapers and at least 3 television stations – the vast majority in Papiamentu (Pin et al. 2016).

I set foot on Curaçao at the end of August 2015. This was a period during which many local (and European Dutch) newspapers and news websites were taking a look back on the five years since the constitutional reform of 10 October 2010. This is a key date, commonly referred to as 10/10/10, when the Netherlands Antilles, the political construct that had held the Dutch Caribbean islands together since 1954, ceased to exist and Curaçao became a constituent country within the Kingdom of The Netherlands. As such, Curaçao became responsible for regulating its own domestic affairs without interference from other Kingdom partners, predominantly The Netherlands. Only a limited number of policy areas are decided on at the Kingdom level, such as foreign policy, defence, citizenship, and the safeguarding of good governance (Veenendaal and Oostindie 2018: 31). But while the four Kingdom countries are formally equivalent, unequal relationships are constitutionally preserved by a democratic deficit through which the Caribbean countries are largely excluded from political decision-making at the Kingdom level. Since 2010 the Dutch government has increasingly intervened in the islands' internal governance via the Kingdom Council (executive organ Kingdom government), consisting of the Council of Ministers of the Netherlands and one Minister Plenipotentiary of each Caribbean Kingdom country. As such, the Caribbean countries are represented yet are far outnumbered by representatives from the European Netherlands. This has led to dissatisfaction and a rhetoric voiced by political and intellectual elites on the islands that claims that a 'recolonization' is afoot.

Apart from political rhetoric on both sides of the ocean, the majority of the islanders share an understanding of the need for constitutional ties with the Dutch Kingdom. Curaçao has seen ongoing political instability and 9 different cabinets in a decade's time (2010-2020). The first Prime Minister of Curaçao, Gerrit Schotte, would later be convicted of political bribery, forgery, and money laundering committed both during his legislative term (2010-2012) and his political career since 2007. In 2013, Curaçao was shaken by the assassination of the popular politician, Helmin Wiels. It is widely believed that he was killed because of his critiques of political corruption and the gambling industry on Curaçao.

Ordinary residents on Curaçao were on the receiving ends of these institutional problems and the persistent economic recessions they perpetuated. Since 2010, between one-quarter to over one-third of Curaçaoan households had been considered living below the poverty line. Structural poverty often interacted with severe social problems, among which are high rates of (youth) unemployment, domestic violence, teenage pregnancies and (organized) crime. Since Dutch colonialism, Curaçao's society had been based on a class-based order. For sure, there was a racialized component to this order, given that most of those finding themselves at the lower ranks of society were Afro-Curaçaoans (black). This, however, did not mean that all Afro-Curaçaoans were part of the lower classes. The revolt that had

taken place in the late 1960s (which emerged as a labour protest against Shell), had caused an institutional shift from predominantly white to partially black. Today, the institutional public of Curaçao – the realm where politicians, business(wo/)men and media owners and managers, among others, are active – was mixed, as was the case for what I term the popular public or the everyday where different realities came to the fore, including of those among the lower classes without access to the institutional public, experiencing ongoing economic insecurity, neglect and a sense of unhomeliness. These experiences form my point departure in discussing practices of survivance in the face of uncertainty – as everyday news routines (turning events into stories) that 'create a sense of presence and situational sentiments of chance (…) [that] cannot be reduced by causal reason or cultural contrasts' but enacts an 'actual sense of the real, a coincidence, an existential venture of uncertainty, and unnamable contradictions' (Vizenor 2008: 16-17).

In the case I present in this paper, I follow 'newsy stories of survivance' around games of chance by focusing on the 'orientations' expressed and enacted through these. Here I build on Bryant and Knight's conceptualization of 'orientations' to understand how 'our future-oriented actions shape our understanding of the present, and its relationship with the past' (2019: 16). Below, I start with my experiences during my fieldwork at the *Èxtra*, the largest Papiamentu-language newspaper on Curaçao, by focusing on everyday news routines around the lottery and, related to these, the obituaries. These news routines, I argue, serve a double function. While one can make the point that they are means by which the establishment keeps the mass in check, one can also argue that they represent imperfect 'ways of transforming one's immediate experience in order to make life more bearable and fulfilling', and 'that allow one to momentarily disengage from everyday situations the better to reengage with them, a way of making the world one's own' (Jackson 2016: 14). Along with being instruments of domination, these news practices are also employed and acted upon by Curaçaoans as practices of survivance.

Games of chance

Driving up the parking lot of the *Èxtra,* the main newspaper on Curaçao, I noticed how busy it was. Many people drove by, stopped their car in front of the office, stepped out and walked quickly to the mail slot next to the entrance door, after which they continued their journey elsewhere. Others parked their car to enter the *Èxtra*'s office, where they used one of the ballpoint pens attached to the reception desk to fill in their lucky number for the daily lottery. It was mid-November 2015 and only a week since I had started with my fieldwork at the *Èxtra*. At this point, I had gotten used to the daily coming and going of people at the building of the *Èxtra* as they handed in a piece of paper cut or torn out of the newspaper to take part in the newspaper's lottery.

The *Èxtra* was located along a main road in the *bario* [neighbourhood], Mundo Nobo. Given the steep prices of electricity and the uncertainty of what tomorrow would bring, working-class Curaçaoans, including those living in Mundo Nobo, bought their electricity via *Pagatinu* [a prepaid card-based charging system]. There were more than sixty *Aqualectra*

(Curaçao's water and electricity company) service points across the island, yet its main office was located on the other side of the road from *Èxtra*. The *Pagatinu* building was a reminder of the daily difficulties in making ends meet. Many people crossed the road from *Aqualectra* to *Èxtra* and, in so doing, shifted their orientation from the difficulties of everyday life to the hope for a better future – that is, by trying to win the lottery.

With the newspaper in one's hands, it was hard to miss the opportunity to win money. Right on the front page the daily cash price was mentioned under the heading '*Gana ku Èxtra*' [Win with *Èxtra*]. At the back of the newspaper, there was a page outlined with advertisements and a box in the middle with the heading '*GANA HOPI PLAKA. Kesh ku Èxtra*' [Win lots of money. Cash with *Èxtra*] [see Figure 2]. Here, one could find yesterday's results of the newspaper's lottery, which was attached to the biggest official drawing on the island, the *Wega di Number* [Game of Numbers]. The winning number of the *Wega di Number* was listed on top of a list with the winning numbers of related lotteries on Bonaire, Sint Maarten, and even the Dominican Republic. This is illustrative of the regional scope of lottery networks as well as Curaçaoans' engagement with them. In the middle of the page, there was a blank form accompanied by the text, '*Yenando bo number deseá di Wega Number Kòrsou pa awe i entregando e kupon na Èxtra, bo tin hopi chens di gana plaka kesh!!!*' [By filling in your lucky number for the Wega Number Kòrsou of today and handing in the coupon at *Èxtra*, you have a great chance to win cash!!!]. The lottery brought many Curaçaoans to the office of the *Èxtra* daily. They passed by to deposit their lucky number – filled in on the form back in the paper – to join the next day's lottery.

Figure 2 – [Left] Front page of the *Èxtra*. [Right] Lottery page in the back of the *Èxtra* (November 23, 2015).

There were many Curaçaoans whose everyday work was somehow linked to the *Wega di Number* or to one of the other lotteries present on the island. There is a history to this which began at the beginning of the 20th century. Back then, gambling was already very popular among Curaçaoans who bought their tickets from lotteries abroad. To counter the loss of capital to foreign countries resulting from this, the colonial government issued the *Loterijverordening* [National Ordinance on the Lottery] in 1909. This law enabled the Governor of Curaçao to issue permits to organize lotteries on the island (Landsloterij 2020). Yet, foreign

lotteries and illegal gambling circuits continued to emerge and with that their popularity among Curaçaoans. Further legal measures were taken in 1949, when the state-owned *Landsloterij* was established, and in 1987, when the *Wega di Number* was legalized.[2]

The institutional embedding of lotteries was accompanied by a growing labour force. There was a gendered aspect to this, and an economic one. Both were related to (changing) family structures on the island. Like elsewhere in the Caribbean, matrifocality (a family structure of interlinked relations centred around women in their role as mother) had prevailed among the Afro-Curaçaoan population until the early 20th century. This changed with the arrival of Royal Dutch Shell and the rapid processes of modern industrialization that followed. While the Church and Shell supported the nuclear family structure (e.g., providing services and financial benefits to married labourers), 'the decline of women's access to subsistence opportunities, together with full employment for men, caused an increase in the gap in earnings between the sexes' (Abraham-Van der Mark 2003: 83). When lay-offs and economic recession set in, the position of those among Curaçao's lower rankings worsened. Simultaneously, the number of 'female-headed households increased, the divorce rate went up and the marriage rate went down' (ibid: 85).

The female-headed households among Curaçao's poor since the late 1960s were different from the matrifocal family structures of the past. Strong maternal support networks were no longer evident in modern-day Curaçao. They had been transformed into a patriarchal system. With only minimal assistance via the *onderstand* [welfare] and a *karchi ku kuminda* [resilience benefit, literally: food voucher], female heads of households in poverty (among whom were many single mothers) came to rely on their own creative ability to get some income – among others, by selling *pastechis* and *bolo pretu* [Curaçaoan street food], or through the resale of legal and illegal lottery tickets (Abraham-Van der Mark 2003: 83). During my fieldwork in 2015, I saw that these activities continued.

Since my start at the *Èxtra* I had often noticed an older woman sitting in a plastic chair in front of the paper's building. Wearing a big fanny pack around her waist or a bag around her shoulder, a sun cap or long sleeves and many layers of clothing to cover her body from the sun, she always held a stack of *brièchinan* [tickets] for what I later found out to be the *Landsloterij*. Since its establishment in 1949, the *Landsloterij* had attained an important position in the Curaçaoan community. With its head office in the island's capital, the *Landsloterij* generated funding for various community-based, arts and charity initiatives as well as employment for 'elderly people in need of supplemental income' (Landsloterij 2020: *n.p.*). Older working-class Curaçaoan women, whose chances for survival had long related to reselling (illegal) lottery tickets, were particularly represented. These days, there were over 600 *Landsloterij* resellers like the lady who sat in front of the *Èxtra* on Curaçao alone, a substantial number on an island with a population of around 155,000 officially registered people. And so 'the lottery seller' had become a cultural phenomenon on Curaçao [see Figure 3] and could be found along the busy *Schottegatweg* [Schottegat Road], at the *snèk* [snack bar], at shopping malls or banks; basically, at any location where they were likely to sell a numbered

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[2] Curaçao's gambling sector was a public-private industry and increasingly so on a global scale. In the late 1990s, a law was enforced that left space for major gambling companies – self-acclaimed 'Master Licence' holders – to provide sub-licences to global actors across the world.

brièchi [ticket] to passers-by. Many resellers, however, had built up a loyal clientele of elderly Curaçaoans who had great faith in their lucky number, which could only be reserved by personal agreement with a particular reseller.

Figure 3 – Wall-painting 'The Lottery Seller' by artist Merly Trappenberg in Otrobanda, Willemstad. Source: Trendbeheer (Dees 2019).

Against all odds

The belief that certain numbers, events, persons, or places would bring good or bad luck was certainly not limited to the island's working classes, nor to its elderly, yet it did relate to the lack of stability in one's life and the future orientations that sprouted from this. There was also a lingering hidden poverty among Curaçaoans, including those who had moved to The Netherlands in the hope of a better life. In a 2017 newscast on persistent poverty and gambling addiction among Curaçaoan elderly in The Netherlands, one of the interviewees said: 'You know what it is in life? You need to keep problems for yourself. (…) You don't have to bring [them] out on the street' (in Jones 2017).

While living in Fleur de Marie, one of Curaçao's poorest neighbourhoods, I often went out for a late-night snack or drink. I only had to walk around the corner, 100 meters, to find my favourite *bentana* [home shops] where Giuliana sold some late-night necessaries via an

opened window in her home. After several visits, Giuliana told me that she was a single mum of four children, three daughters and a son. She did not expect to become pregnant with her first daughter as a teenager while still at school. She soon dropped out when she was expecting her second daughter and the father left out of sight. The father of her youngest daughter and son was still around, but they did not live together. When I asked her how she managed making ends meet, Giuliana said she had to be creative by selling late-night groceries and by cleaning hotels during the day, but she quickly assured me that neither she nor her daughters were like 'the ladies of Fleur de Marie' – hinting to the Latin-American women who sold their bodies to Curaçaoan men to get some income. During the past decade, Fleur de Marie indeed had seen an influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants, not least via human trafficking and (forced) prostitution, yet the latter was certainly not exclusive to these 'ladies'. I was confronted with the latter when I walked towards Giuliana's *bentana* one night, and suddenly noticed two men, one walking in and the other out of her house. At that moment, I decided to walk to the corner street café in the opposite direction, only to find a dozen men surrounding some of 'the ladies of Fleur de Marie' that Giuliana might have been talking about.

Airing one's dirty laundry in public, including one's poverty and the necessary means to endure this, was frowned upon among Curaçaoans. One was expected to keep up appearances and act 'respectable' – a social norm that reflected the ongoing legacies of the colonial socio-political system. This system was in place until the late 19th century. The status of the 'white' *shon* [master] was maintained by the *respèt* [respect] the subordinated *katibu* [enslaved] had to show (see Hoetink 1958). After the formal Dutch abolition of slavery in 1863, the Roman Catholic Church took on its Mission to 'civilize' the formerly enslaved Curaçaoans and educate them to become *hende drechi* [decent people] (Allen 2007: 149; 172). Among Curaçaoans social control of norms of behavior on the importance of acting 'respectable' persisted up until today. Behavior that is considered *faltu di respèt* [disrespectful] and *sinberguensa* [shameless] is often publicly condemned, based on the association with *hende brua* [rude people] – those who must be 'civilized' and who are at the bottom and the margins of society. During my fieldwork, however, that this history was first and foremost enacted by *hende dreche* among the island's middle-classes, in fearful anticipation of becoming *hende brua* and thereby losing one's social status.

I experienced this quite closely when a friend lost a respected job in the e-consultancy business on the island. She hid at home and went hungry until finding new work just as prestigious rather than accepting what she considered to be a less respected job, such as working in hospitality. Losing one's social status formed a real risk for those who had a certain status to maintain. This was certainly the case for those among the (higher) middle-classes who aspired the become part of the elites (wealthy CEOs and landowners). In Curaçao's class-based social order, the higher one went up, the smaller the island got. Among elites everyone knew everyone through *nètwèrks* [networks] as these close and opaque webs of elite relations were commonly referred to (Römer 2017: 198-99). For those who aspired to become part of these exclusive *nètwèrks*, there was a lingering fear of losing one's job, and with that, one's face (and thus privilege) overnight.

For most Curaçaoans, however, it was not about what one could lose, it was about what could be won. And from this perspective, airing your dirty laundry – or publicly speaking

up, for that matter – was not (only) shameful or fearful, but considered utterly unwise. I learned through my engagements with Giuliana and others that '[f]or people without power,' as anthropologist Michael Jackson argued, 'the skills of stealth, cunning, dissociation, two-facedness, and even trickery become means of survival' (2016: 127).

Institutional actors, in turn, acted upon these means and knowledges of survival among Curaçao's poor. A case in point was the *Landsloterij* campaign launched in 2019. With the slogan 'AT'ABO SA!' [Look! You know!], the aim was to attract young(er) Curaçaoans. The popular Curaçaoan rapper, Dongo, became the face of this campaign in newspaper advertisements, TV commercials, and on billboards along busy roads. Accompanied by hashtags *#WannaBeAMillionaire* and *#Gana1Mion* [Win 1 million], a series of clips circulated on social media in which Dongo jumped on a shopping cart and 'surfed' through a supermarket grabbing as much as he could in one minute [see Figure 3]. These clips were meant to be funny and ironic at the same time. Instead of hiding greed, shame, fear, and hope, the campaign starring Dongo unpacked and enlarged these shared feelings in Curaçao's society. It did so in satirical contrast to everyday realities on the island, especially of the poor for whom such goods were largely inaccessible.

This too was the case for Dongo's video clip *Brièchi* that became a hit with over 50,000 views on YouTube in 2019. The chorus of the song spoke to what was common knowledge and practice among Curaçaoans: 'Tur hende ke gana (Brièchi!) | Bintidos Wega pa aña (Brièchi!) | Kumpra un kas pabo mama (Brièchi)!' [Everyone wants to win (Ticket!)| Twenty-two draws a year (Ticket!)| Buying a house for your mom (Ticket!)]. The latter bit articulated the reality of female-headed households (including single-mothers) among Curaçao's lower classes as well as illustrating the financial support that was expected of children for their mother(s). The latter was (or could be) an act of love for one's caregivers. It was also a social norm of 'respectability'. Yet more than displaying the dreams that could be fulfilled if one won the lottery, Dongo's video clip spoke to Curaçaoans by ridiculing acting 'respectable' in terms of pretending one was someone one was not. An example of this was a scene featuring Dongo making a selfie while on a jet ski with two ladies (one of them waving a stack of lottery tickets). The scene speaks to dreams of owning a jet ski, while ridiculing acting 'as if' one already has one (it only becomes clear that this jet ski is placed in a rental truck when the camera zooms out). Another scene shows Dongo walking to a luxurious car he seemed to remotely open, only to find out he is holding the keys of his bicycle parked next to it [see Figure 4].

As a popular rapper who knew *bida den kaya* [street life], Dongo also articulated the sense of what Curaçaoans called *bida den miseria* [miserable life]. In 2015 Dongo released another hit-track: *Bida* [Life]. In contrast to the video clip for *Brièchi*, which showed what the Curaçaoans longed for, shots from the music video for *Bida* illustrated what those living in the poor *bario* wished to escape, namely *tur kos malu* [all bad things] as the result of poverty, feelings of misery, and persistent stigmatization and discrimination [see Figure 5].

Compared to the brightly-coloured clip of *Brièchi,* the clip of *Bida* showed dusty yellow-ish shots which reflected how the island was often covered by dusty Sahara sand carried by the ever-present *passaatwind* [trade wind]. Life at the lower rungs of society was rough and dirty. Yet, it was also full of moments of joy, of care, and of comradery, as well as of freedom to focus on these. This was at the core of the song's lyrics, for example in: 'Bo ke kore den

Benz anto ami ta draai riba sunny' [You think about driving your Benz, but I turn towards sunny (the light)]. Thrown into this life, one had a choice to focus on what it offered, rather than on what it lacked. This message spoke to many on and beyond Curaçao. *Bida* had more than 1.4 million views on YouTube (December 2021).

By attracting a popular rap artist, the *Landsloterij* used channels of mass-popular culture to capitalize on the modes through which Curaçao's poor expressed aspirations and dreams of (a better) life. Buying one's *brièchi* was such an expression. That is, of an orientation of hope that reflected deeper social concerns about the insecurity and instability many Curaçaoans had to live by or, rather, made the most of. There was an irony to this orientation of hope that wasn't quite captured when focusing solely on the message of Dongo's clip *Bida* in terms of 'always look at the bright sight of life'. The clip spoke to the widespread experience among Curaçaoans with daily struggles to make ends meet. For those living in poverty, turning 'towards sunny' was not about being positive, but often meant: a creative endurance, in the hope for a better future against all odds.

Figure 4 – Screen shots from the 'At'Abo Sa!' [Look, you know!] campaign of the *Landsloterij* in 2019. From left top to bottom right: stills from the video clip *Brièchi,* featuring: 1. Dongo taking a selfie while on a jet ski placed in a rental truck with two ladies (one them waving a stack of lottery tickets). 2. Dongo buying his *brièchi* from 'the lottery seller'; 3. An ecstatic mom, wearing a fur coat, luxurious jewellery, and holding a Chanel bag, as she receives the keys of a new house (Teamdongo 2019); 4. Still from a *Landsloterij* advertisement with Dongo jumping on a shopping cart in a one-minute supermarket run (Èxtra 2019).

Figure 5 – Screen shots from the video clip *Bida* (Teamdongo, 2015). From top left to bottom right: 1. Dongo eating *funchi ku jogurt* [funchi with yogurt], a staple dish among Curaçaoans; 2. Dongo illustrating the violence one faces living the *bida den kaya* in front of the *Isla* oil refinery which produces pollution that affects the poor *barios* on the west side most; 3. Dongo *ta bai keiru* [drives around] – a common practice and saying on the island – while passing children and a *kachó di kaya* [street dog], whose life is often compared to that of the Curaçaoan poor; 4. Text on a building, saying: 'If you can dream it, you can do it'; 5. The latter is countered with Dongo entering a *toko* when the shot turns blurry; 'dikon ni ta pasa tampoko ma bida ta blur' [why nothing happens, my life is blurred]; 6. Dongo raps: 'mi ta diskrimina dilanti pa bai riba junkies' [I am discriminated against for going to junkies], while he gives a neighbour some cash for cleaning his (old) car.

Winning and losing: the facts of life

I remember being rather sceptical about its lottery as I started my fieldwork at *Èxtra*. This scepticism originated from my own (bourgeois) middle-class upbringing and education

underpinned by liberal-democratic ideals of transparency, objectivity and rational-critical deliberation. It was based on notions of the lottery being a 'tax on stupidity' and, basically, a losing game: participating in games of chance was rationally biased and the hope for winning someday was an illusion. This reasoning was shared by members of the (upper) middle-classes on Curaçao, including (formally educated) journalists working at or with news media that catered to those belonging to the higher rungs of the island's social order.

This was different for the *Èxtra,* though, which held the biggest market share of the island's news industry. When I expressed my scepticism to the newspaper's chief-editor, Marc, he replied: 'The lottery is something of this people. It's just a fact of life. It's just a fact of life' (interview with Marc, 11 December 2015). With 'this people', Marc who belonged to the (darker-skinned) middle-classes, distanced himself from those for whom the lottery was, indeed, a fact of life. Yet, at the same time, for us both – sitting in the *Èxtra*'s editorial room – the lottery formed 'a fact of life' too. The full page dedicated to the lottery in the back of the daily made the lottery *a daily life event.* It provided 'the news' on numbers, drawings, and results, while simultaneously perpetuating feelings of hope and fear as reflections of the lottery *as a story of life*.

This story specifically spoke to Curaçao's working classes. They lived life day-by-day with the only certainty being that life was uncertain and, ultimately, a game of chance. In the face of an unknown tomorrow, Curaçao's poor – but, in reality, all of us – experienced an unsettling anxiety. Their lottery-related practices of newsmaking (including dissemination, selling, buying, and consuming) were a reminder that we all were thrown into 'the lottery of life' – a world full of chance.

This was probably best illustrated by the evening programming on television, which continued to be the most popular medium among Curaçaoans (CBS 2018). Each night, Curaçaoans tuned in to the main channel of *TeleCuraçao,* Curaçao's public broadcaster, to find out whether today was their lucky day. The daily draw of the *Wega di Number* had among the highest ratings on national television. And even if one tuned in to a different channel, one could not avoid the smaller viewing box broadcasting the draw in the corner of one's screen.[3] And so, I experienced how the live broadcast was on screen in almost every Curaçaoan living room, in cafés, *snèks,* and late-night offices, including *Èxtra*'s newsroom, where I noticed editors and reporters looking up from their desk and watching the TV hanging above them as soon as the numbers were drawn.

Immediately after the day's winners were decided by a randomly drawn series of numbers, the evening programming continued with what appeared to be that other, yet definitely more certain, 'fact of life': death. In the program *Partisipashon di Morto* [Mentioning of the Death], the names of those who had died were announced – or, at least, the names of those whose families could afford and were willing to pay 100 NAF[4] (around 56 USD) or, when including a picture of the person, 175 NAF (close to 100 USD) [see Figure 6].

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[3] In fact, only since 2014 has the live broadcast of the drawing no longer entirely interrupted other programs running on national TV (Qracao 2014).

[4] NAF stands for Netherlands Antilles Guilder, which is the official currency of Curaçao (and Sint Maarten). NAF is pegged to the US dollar (1 NAF ≈ $ 0.55).

Figure 6 – Screenshot from *TeleCuraçao*'s business page for 'Partisipashon di Morto' (taken on 16 June 2020).

Publication of the names of those who had passed on was extremely important to Curaçaoans and deeply embedded in practices of newsmaking. The founder of the *Èxtra* told me that the daily obituaries in the *Èxtra* formed, in fact, the main reason that the newspaper had attained and maintained its dominant position in the local press. Chief-editor Marc added the following explanation of why the obituaries were so important to Curaçaoans:

> If you buy the *Èxtra* in the morning, then you know (…) all of whom passed away. *Verrryyy* important for the Curaçaoan community. To know all who passed away and when the funeral is! *[punches fist on the table]*. Because contrary to The Netherlands, here you don't receive an invitation to – *no*! You are *expected* that you – you know that person, or you know his sister, or you know his brother, or you know his brother-in-law, or whomever – come to the funeral. Ok? Then [by reading the *Èxtra* – SR] everyone knows it. *Very* important. (Interview with Marc, 11 December 2015)

Here, the chief-editor related news practices around funerals to social norms of what I described above as acting 'respectable'. On Curaçao, one did not receive an announcement with information about a funeral, nor was one personally notified in case someone had passed. Instead, one was expected to know and to subsequently show up at a funeral out of respect for the one that had passed on and their loved ones (see Allen 2007: 248-49). This expectation of *knowing* who had passed and acting 'respectable' by attending a funeral had generated popular news practices of buying the *Èxtra,* in which, according to its management, 99% of the daily obituaries could be found.

Respectability was but one aspect however, as I came to realize. Checking the daily obituaries formed a daily future-oriented news routine among Curaçaoans. Attending a funeral was not solely about respectability but also a joint reminder that chance and unpredictability were parts of life for everyone regardless of one's social station. In a similar way, news practices around games of chance – from the daily routine of handing in one's lucky number at the *Èxtra* and buying one's *brièchi* to watching the live broadcast of the daily drawing – reflected a shared need among Curaçaoans to navigate uncertainty. News practices around both obituaries and lotteries highlighted the slogan of the *Landsloterij,* 'AT'ABO SA!' [Look, you know!], because one *had* to know and, at the same time, *longed* to know. And this two-fold motive for engaging with 'the news' was known to all (you know?). It was therefore no coincidence that the *Wega di Number* and the *Partisipashon di Morto* were broadcast during the same (prime) time slot at night. It also explained why – and this was common knowledge on the island – Curaçaoans read the newspaper from future to present. Many made sure to first check out the 'new' and 'noteworthy' – that is, who had lost (obituaries) and who had won (lottery results) – before turning to 'the news' about recent events in the rest of the newspaper. Curaçaoans jointly oriented towards the future: its endless possibilities and the ultimate inevitable. And in doing so, they put their faith in God that ultimately decided who would win the next draw and whose life would end tomorrow.

Tomorrow, *ku Dios ke*

Among Curaçaoans, God was *bida* [life] in all its complexity and contingency. Like any other who participated in quotidian island life, I was frequently reminded by God's presence, particularly in forms of sociality. It was common to remind each other of God's omnipresence upon greeting, in small talk, during deeper conversations, and upon leaving. These social practices had been passed over from (and through) generations. 'All these expressions stem from the concept of a Supreme Being determining everyone's lives,' as Allen argued in her (oral) historical study of Afro-Curaçaoan culture, adding that this concept 'was also manifest when one made plans for the future' (2007: 240). One of Allen's interviewees clearly articulated this shared orientation and how it informed everyday social conventions:

> You must not say 'till tomorrow'. You are not allowed to. You must say: 'Till tomorrow with God's will.' Then God will know that you have faith in Him. Because if God doesn't want to, you cannot see tomorrow. Nowadays people talk without thinking how they have to say the words. 'Till tomorrow...?' You don't know. You may die today. (Edouardo Tokaai in Allen 2007: 240)

Yet, perhaps more than an expression of genuine faith in God 'to control fate' and that 'his power was evident in all aspects of life, such as the search for work, whether or not it would rain and the potential of a newly dug well' (Allen 2007: 237), the above account expressed how reminding each other of God's will was an articulation of chance ('You don't know. You may die today.').

This outlook on the life of today and tomorrow continued to be an important means to navigate uncertainty among Curaçaoans. In my conversation with David and Yordan, the initiators of a popular satirical weblog on the particularities of Curaçaoan culture, they reflected on the ongoing expression of 'ku Dios ke' [God Willing] in daily island life:

> David: That's culture, that is deeply rooted. Yes, and you hear it back in particular sentences we standardly use. If I say to my mom: 'I will go to Trinidad and Tobago with my girlfriend in November', then she says to me— and she often says this: 'God Willing' and 'it *could* be so that'—
>
> Yordan: '*ku Dios ke*'.
>
> David: Your mother is caring. She says that to you and the message is that [she wants] you [to] be happy. And that God's Will ultimately determines this.
>
> Yordan: 'I have a job at the McDonald's. That must be God's Will that I, that I'— they are searching for acceptance, I think. (Interview with David and Yordan, 31 October 2015)

Here, David and Yordan reflected upon several reasons for why '*ku Dios ke*' was so deeply embedded in daily communication among Curaçaoans – from a wish for one to be happy to a search for acceptance. Either way, with the expression of '*ku Dios ke*' Curaçaoans recalled that life – just as death – was ultimately 'God Willing'. Yet, while for David and Yordan (two successful black middle-class professionals in their thirties), *ku Dios ke* merely signalled 'an impulse to passively "persevere in being"', I learned that the notion of God Willing also consisted of 'the search for "adequate ideas" that enable us to actively sustain our sense of presence and purpose' (Ricoeur 1992: 316, in Jackson and Piette 2015: 12).

A few months after my conversation with David and Yordan, I met with Soraya in the MacDonald's at a busy crossroad of the *Schottegatweg*. By that time, I had become quite familiar with central meeting spots like these – the Starbucks in *Riffort* was another case in point – where Curaçaoan professionals, entrepreneurs, and expats came to work and socialize. Soraya worked for the daily news cast at *TeleCuraçao*. She came from a black working-class background and had been able to climb the social ladder through following a journalism training in The Netherlands. During our conversation, she reflected upon the uncertainties she and her close ones were facing in the wake of the constitutional reform in 2010, by which the island became an autonomous country as part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, saying:

> Look, life's getting harder, you know? It's quite a cliché, but if I look at myself, I notice that, yes, the more autonomous we become, the further we go into the 21st century, the harder life gets. It's thus a sort of struggle of how do I survive? What makes me happy? (Interview with Soraya, 27 May 2016)

Here, Soraya pointed to the struggle many Curaçaoans had increasingly faced – and continued to do so – in terms of securing income, employment, and being happy, as time moved on. As she posed the questions above, I looked up at the counter where three employees were

sharing a joke. It reminded me of my conversation with David and Yordan. I wondered whether working at the MacDonald's, *ku Dios ke*, was necessarily a search for acceptance or could also be an acknowledgement of the chances immanent to life. In this way, reminding each other of *ku Dios ke* could also resemble 'enacted destiny', 'an idea of divine empowerment, which enables believers to deal with risk and contingency' (Nieswand 2010: 51, in Bryant and Knight 2019: 174).

At the same time, it could also serve as a reminder that all – including those belonging to higher rungs in society – were subjected to God's Will. Differently put, faced with deeply felt uncertainty, many Curaçaoans acknowledged that the future was in fact unknown, also for those with earthly powers. As such, they practiced news abundantly by tuning in to radio programs that were brought to them by individual politicians; by lining up before cameras whenever the Dutch Royals visited the island; by sharing the talk of the town as they went to church; by buying their *brièchi* at 'the lottery seller' and handing in their lucky number at the *Èxtra*. For many institutional actors, these practices of news formed a puzzling paradox – one that was often understood as the result of either an emotion-versus-rationality dichotomy, of 'false consciousness' or, else to an overall lack of education among Curaçaoans, especially the poor. However, there was no paradox. Curaçaoans, particularly those who found themselves at the bottom of the island's social order could only win (or safeguard the very little they had) by acting as though they were 'aping their betters' or in other ways behaving as people from the middle classes would. Persistent economic dependency, and the daily struggles to make ends meet that came with this, forced many on the island to be receptive to services, materials, and goods provided by those in power – including a job at the MacDonald's. At the same time, many putted their faith in and hope for a better life someday. There was nothing irrational to this pragmatic future-oriented outlook as articulated and enacted in everyday news routines. After all, as Calkins (2016) reminds us, 'who knows the future?' Based on a similar rationale, by purchasing a lottery ticket, many Curaçaoans were 'not taking a risk or risking their money (given the very long odds), they [were] orienting positively to and embracing chance' (Cosgrave 2021: 131). They knew that life was, in fact, a lottery. And so, they celebrated this life full of chance, knowing that no living soul could escape this contingency.

Conclusion

My aim in this paper has been to explore how practices of survivance (Vizenor 2008) might be conceptualized according to the localities and temporalities expressed through everyday news routines on Curaçao. I have focused on how Curaçaoans navigate uncertainty through future-oriented news routines around games of chance and, related to these, the obituaries. In the case I have presented, this means practicing news in the hope for a better future (lottery) and in anticipation of a future that is inevitable (obituaries). While the first speaks to an unknown future that is desired, the second speaks to the immanence of an inevitable future full of chance. Whereas institutional actors (in politics, business, media) on the island and in the Dutch world orientate toward mitigating uncertainty and anticipating risk – also, at times,

in relation to capitalizing on desires and hopes – I have argued that everyday news routines around the lottery (of life) may also be interpreted as how Curaçaoans, especially those marginalized and without access to the institutional public, creatively navigate uncertainty by embracing chance. Orienting towards the future fed feelings of fear, yet it was also what bared hope. It was where the imagination for potential (better) futures sprouted.

From the daily routine of handing in one's lucky number at the *Èxtra* and buying one's *brièchi* to watching the live broadcast of the daily drawing, news practices around the lottery reflected a shared future orientation of hope. For Curaçaoans facing severe poverty and hardships, buying a lot was not about whether this was worth the risk. After all, they had nothing to lose really. At the same time, they also reminded each other of what in fact could be lost – an uncertainty that all human beings, including those in power, had to deal with. This acknowledgement of an inevitable future, which was also unknown, was not one of passive awaiting, but one that enacted survivance, as a (singular) sense of presence (Vizenor 2008). It enabled them to take a hand in their lot by 'orienting positively to and embracing chance' (Cosgrave 2021: 131) in the hope for a better life one day, *ku Dios ke*.

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FARMING PARADISE: COVID-19 AND THE COEXISTENTIAL RIFT

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In global discourses, the Galapagos Islands have been described as a 'laboratory of evolution' and as the Earth's last paradise. These discourses have shaped the archipelago, attracting migrants and tourists. While scholars and inhabitants claim that residents have no culture, many farmers have a deep sense of belonging. My ethnographic fieldwork during the pandemic (2020-2021) suggested that this sense of belonging – a key to coexistence – is being weakened by the numerous overlapping risks currently facing Galapagueño farmers, including pests, climate change, and COVID-19. These challenges have aggravated existing problems in the agricultural sector, leading to a *coexistential rift*, a vicious cycle where farmers become more alienated from the earth they cultivate and from one another, due to their greater market dependence and the desperate need to make money. The risk this paper focuses on, COVID-19, acted like a 'time machine', bringing back aspects of what life had been like before the tourism boom and reviving a deep sense of nostalgia for a utopian past where people knew and cared for one another in the community and had a deep connection to the soil. Paradoxically, it has revealed utopian desires for the future which cannot materialize due to uncertainty, indebtedness, and the current political and economic system. By fostering a stronger sense of coexistence and supporting the agricultural sector, we have the potential to address social and environmental challenges.

Keywords: Galapagos Islands, paradise, belonging, risk, coexistential rift

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Galapagos: paradise, laboratory, or lifeworld?

Two of the most prevalent concepts in the public imagination relating to the Galapagos Islands are 'paradise' and 'tranquillity'. As geographer Christophe Grenier (2007 [2002]) explains, the archipelago is linked to a dual myth: as a pristine 'last paradise' for tourists and as an 'El Dorado' for Ecuadorian migrants who seek tranquillity and higher paid work. Originally viewed as a worthless landscape (Latorre 1999) that was associated with pirates, whalers, and small settler communities populated by convicts, the external perception of the archipelago has dramatically shifted over the last few decades. While early 20th-century scientists labelled the Galapagos as a 'laboratory of evolution' to incentivize the conservation of the archipelago (Hennessy 2017), the burgeoning tourism industry in the 1970s promoted the imaginary idea of pristine nature, adding Galapagos to global fantasies of the 'spectacle of nature' (Brockington et al. 2008; Igoe 2010).[2] In turn, these mediascapes (Appadurai 1996) have led tourism to grow exponentially, with over 270,000 people visiting the archipelago in 2018 and 2019, and the local inhabitants have increased from approximately 1,300 in 1950 to over 25,000 today (INEC, 2015).

Based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that ever since the creation of the Galapagos National Park Directorate (GNPD) and the Charles Darwin Foundation[3] (CDF) in 1959, Galapagos' inhabitants have been living under a nearly hegemonic *conservationist paradigm*, an overarching ideology that is based on a few foundational presuppositions: (1) that the conservation of the archipelago is more important than all other forms of interaction with the environment, which are considered extractivist; (2) that locals are destroying nature and there is a certain 'carrying capacity' for the archipelago, based on a predominantly Neo-Malthusian argument (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1960; De Groot 1983; Bensted-Smith 2002); (3) that a strict set of rules and regulations must exist, in addition to migratory restrictions, to prevent the environment from being destroyed. For instance, Quiroga (2009) compellingly explains how global flows of imagery about Galapagos' pristine nature contributed to increased flows of humans and, therefore, threatened the environment and the isolation that led to the archipelago's uniqueness. This 'Galapagos paradox' is premised upon the idea that humans *cannot coexist* with their environment.

Under the current neoliberal capitalist system, these assumptions of human destructiveness may be partly true, as people focus on short-term profit over sustainability in an archipelago where little money reaches local inhabitants.[4] Salcedo has argued that economic inequality is at

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[2] This term is used to describe images of nature used by conservationists, in cooperation with the capitalist system, to justify actions taken to protect the environment, attract funding and foster an environmental ethic (Brockington et al. 2008: 175-200).

[3] As the archipelago's first scientific organization, CDF provides research for the GNPD's conservation efforts.

[4] Neoliberalism is 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices' (Harvey 2005: 2).

the root of conflict among Galapagueño social sectors (2008: 33). Despite a 78% increase in the archipelago's total revenue between 1995 and 2005, average per capita income only increased 1.8% (Taylor et al. 2007: 128). The tourism industry and the political and economic structures that allow it to operate are mainly responsible for this inequality, which aggravate existing problems in Galapagos. As Burke (2021: 13-14) has pointed out, the current tourism model 'accelerates food insecurity' and does not address the 'externalities and risks' that the industry poses to the inhabitants of the archipelago.

The world has been divided into 'risk winners and risk losers' (Beck 1999: 64). In the case of Galapagos, the people who were not responsible for producing risks (such as rubbish or pollution) must suffer the consequences of the tourism operators who make the money and later donate relatively small percentages of their accumulated wealth towards 'conservation'. In fact, these economic sectors tend to 'blame the victim' by claiming that the local population is responsible for degradation and should be better educated or informed. Furthermore, globalization has led to the expansion of 'dreamscapes' (Appadurai 2015), leading participants to desire new technology and intensifying the flow of commodities to the archipelago. For most people worldwide, as Achille Mbembe highlighted, globalization has simply been 'licking at the shop-window' (*lécher la vitrine,* quoted in Meyer and Geschiere 1999: 5). Dreams and desires increase but livelihoods do not, leaving people frustrated with the newfound inadequacy of their lives in relation to globalized utopias.

In addition to inequality under the ethos of neoliberal capitalism, in Galapagos the 'fortress conservation model' (Brockington 2002) is still the *status quo* and laws prevent locals from going kayaking or camping without permits. Most inhabitants are simply unable to afford going to see the uninhabited islands because they can only be visited by cruise ships, so they often feel like they are 'living inside a beautiful jail'.[5] On the other hand, tourists who visit the archipelago are often surprised to discover that four of the islands are inhabited by human populations. As Brockington et al. (2008) point out, Marx's idea of commodity fetishism is a useful way of understanding the way in which Nature is consumed with social and historical contexts obscured. Debord (1995 [1967]) elaborated on the role of the media in fetishizing experiences to the extent that people's lives become the accumulation of spectacles and certain parts of the world are designated as 'tourist playgrounds' (Brockington et al. 2008). Furthermore, the alliance between tourism and conservationist sectors is apparent, with organizations like the CDF depending upon donations from cruise ship companies in order to operate. As in other parts of the world, conservation work is well aligned with neoliberalism in the sense that 'hybrid governance' systems are created to ensure profitable 'ecotourism', unlimited growth, and re-territorialization that usually involves controlling 'fence and fine' strategies for locals living inside national parks (Igoe and Brockington 2007).

In summary, as part of the Western 'cult of wilderness' (Martinez-Alier 2002), there is currently an overarching *conservationist paradigm* focused on taking the archipelago 'back to Eden'

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[5]All participant conversations from my ethnographic fieldwork in Galapagos were translated from Spanish.

(Bensted-Smith 2002: 1), unrealistically attempting to undo the damage committed by humans since the islands were discovered in 1535. The scientific and conservationist project to conserve Galapagos for humanity has been deemed an example of 'classic imperialism' (Grenier and de Miras 1994: 665), or what Ramírez refers to as 'neocolonial conservationism' (2004: 237), allowing for both the expansion of international tourism companies and greater Ecuadorian sovereignty over the archipelago. This *conservationist paradigm* has led to a combination of strict laws that alienate people from their environment, prioritize transforming Nature into a commodity for wealthy tourists to consume, and accelerate the flows of people, invasive species, finance, objects, media, etc. Grenier succinctly states that '[t]he history of Galapagos is one of the spatial transformation of its nature due to the networks of capitalism' (2007 [2002]: 24). Hence, despite his scathing criticisms of natural scientists due to their relationship to the tourism industry, he agrees with them that sustainability can only be achieved by reducing these flows. Grenier argued that to have a 'true ecotourism' (2007: 437) the archipelago should lessen its exposure to external flows by reducing the numbers of tourists that visit the islands, lengthening their average stay, cutting the number of cruise operators, and increasing the amount of land-based tourism. Under the current neoliberal logic of constant growth, none of these actions have been implemented and it seems unlikely that the politicians and tourism sector would be interested in doing so.

In an attempt to reconcile human and non-human actors of Galapagos and to rebrand Galapagos as a refuge, Laso (2020) suggests that we think of Galapagos as a garden. Although this is better than the paradise or laboratory analogies, because it incorporates the idea of growing food, a garden still implies a place that is managed by humans. I suggest that we abandon branding the archipelago altogether because each metaphor carries intellectual baggage. However, if we must use a metaphor, I propose labelling Galapagos as a *lifeworld.* Ingold uses this inclusive concept to describe humans inhabiting the world 'in a way that does not…reduce them to mere objects of nature' (2000: 90) and which emphasizes a 'dwelt-in world' (Ingold 1993: 40) in addition to entangled relationships between living and non-living entities. In other words, Galapagos is a place like other locations on Earth, filled with a rich environmental and human history, and which cannot be reduced to being a 'tourist playground' paradise or a laboratory to be studied.

Rather than focus on Neo-Malthusian arguments about the ecosystemic threat posed by Galapagos' human population, we should be thinking about the quality of relationships, and whether *coexistence* between humans and the environment can be achieved. In accordance with Burke's (2021) observation that the existing tourism model fails to enhance the archipelago's food security, Viteri (2017) contends that strengthening the agricultural sector can lead to a reduction in imported goods and invasive species. By strengthening the agricultural sector and lessening inequality, social and environmental problems in the archipelago could be improved. (Andrada et al. 2010: 126). Additionally, a sense of belonging is socially beneficial, because with a greater sense of solidarity there would be fewer conflicts and a deeper connection with the environment. The remainder of this paper will explore how a Galapagueño sense of belonging and coexistence has been threatened by compounding risks, including the COVID-19 pandemic,

which will be described ethnographically, and propose a theoretical framework for understanding the ways in which risks can alter people's lives.

'To belong, or not to belong'

Galapagueños often say that 'there is no culture in Galapagos.' Such arguments are based on the fact that there has been an exponential population increase in the last few decades from the Ecuadorian mainland and internationally. Hunt et al. (2022) claim there is a *cultural identity crisis* because inhabitants 'do not yet have a cohesive culture' (Hunt et al. 2022: 12); since Galapagos has no Indigenous people, it is the longest standing colonists who are able to assert the greatest claim over sovereignty. Unlike other locations where Indigenous people must be 'ecologically noble' in order to receive support (Brockington et al. 2008: 125), in Galapagos it has been possible to retain the 'pristine myth' (Denevan 1992) and under the *conservationist paradigm* that considers all humans introduced species, its inhabitants must constantly prove their legitimacy. Contrary to Hunt et al. (2022), who fail to acknowledge that all cultures worldwide are dynamic and fragmented, understanding Galapagueño identity requires directing attention to the (mostly economic) tensions between social groups and the obstacles to a stronger sense of belonging to the archipelago.

Ospina (2003: 116-19) argued that the defining factor of Galapagueño identity is people's individual use of nature, whether it be fishing, farming, or tourism; in turn, debates over the 'correct' relationship to the environment have led to social conflict over resources. Despite conflicts still occurring and criticisms of conservationists by other sectors, environmental viewpoints nowadays are taken for granted. According to Foucault (1976), one of the essential aspects of governmentality and biopolitics is that people unwittingly impose the government's rules upon themselves. Agrawal (2005) proposed the term 'environmentality' to explain how governments can instil an environmental ethic and a particular view of 'the environment' in its citizens. Therefore, in Galapagos the *conservationist paradigm* is a form of successful environmentality espoused by the GNPD and CDF ever since their institutions became operational in 1964. These days, most people refrain from eating giant tortoises, are hyperaware about recycling and appropriate rubbish disposal, and ensure they keep at least six feet away from wildlife.

Andrada et al. (2010: 69-70) observed that the predominance of scientific terminology, such as 'endemic' and 'introduced', has created a hierarchy of living things, and makes it difficult for inhabitants to ever develop a deep sense of belonging:

> All living things in Galapagos are subject to a purity test (…) All are classified
> according to their 'origin'. Introduced? Endemic? Native? These variables create a
> hierarchy of living organisms that stigmatizes introduced species, especially 'plagas'
> (*pests*) (…) humans are always a potential 'plaga' (…) it is very difficult for humans

to find their place on the islands; they will always be precarious, like uneasy and uncomfortable visitors who cannot find their place because they harm everything they touch.

Alternatively, Bocci (2022) contests the idea that Galapagos inhabitants lack a sense of belonging and 'are only a place to visit' (Ibid: 104), explaining that farmers have 'long-term ties with the islands' (Ibid: 109), a cultural sense of belonging he refers to as *arraigo* (rootedness). The author, who conducted extensive ethnographic research with farmers prior to the pandemic, explains this rootedness as stemming from: (1) farmers dwelling on the islands for much longer than the existence of the tourism industry; (2) their feelings of pride and responsibility for feeding the local community; (3) their ability to survive global crises; (4) their active role in managing their land; (5) their resistance to marginalization through peer networks and cooperatives. He argues that policymakers should rethink resilience and adaptation because *arraigo* could have enormous potential for 'convivial conservation',[6] where humans are actively involved in environmental conservation, and that 'agriculture can be a vehicle for culture' (2022: 110).

 While I generally agree with Bocci's assessment of farmers' deeper sense of dwelling and am convinced that the issue of belonging is at the heart of understanding human-environment relations, I reiterate that in the Galapagos context smallholder farmers are among the most economically marginalized groups and, based on my in-depth interviews, it is evident that they are tired of inhabitants being considered 'introduced species' under the *conservationist paradigm*. Additionally, despite farmers' strong desire for belonging and coexistence, 'convivial conservation' cannot be achieved unless: (a) farmers are supported economically, since most are struggling with indebtedness; (b) there is a huge political shift, because farmers believe current policies are only making their lives more difficult. The networks of peer support and cooperatives that Bocci describes were actually criticized as being non-functional by the frustrated farmers I spoke to. While conducting ethnographic fieldwork research with farmers during the pandemic (September 2020-August 2021) for my DPhil thesis (Stimson 2023), I perceived a different reality: one of great nostalgia for a utopian past, complaints about indebtedness, a growing sense of alienation from the community and in relation to the soil, and a sense that even though belonging (*arraigo*) may still be the ultimate goal, a widening *coexistential rift* is preventing it from happening.

COVID-19: survivance, coexistence, and risk

The COVID-19 pandemic was a unique time to be conducting ethnographic research in Galapagos. Documenting its effects in the archipelago not only has unique historical value, but also revealed the ways in which residents cope with livelihood challenges and was insightful for

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[6] Convivial conservation is defined by Büscher and Fletcher as 'a vision, a politics, and a set of governance principles for the future of conservation'; it has the goal of undoing the dichotomy of humans and nature by conceptualizing inhabitants of protected areas as 'dwellers' rather than 'aliens', amongst other objectives (2020: 284).

understanding the relationship between capitalism, risk, and anxiety. When COVID-19 emerged worldwide, the Galapagos Islands closed itself off to tourists from mid-March 2020 to June 2020. Puerto Ayora, the largest town in the archipelago, was once filled with boisterous tourists shopping for t-shirts and going to bars, but in September 2020 it was eerily deserted and shops were closed. It felt like a ghost town. Numerous disinfection systems were installed at the ports, airports, and hotels in the hopes of making tourists feel Galapagos was safe to visit. Since news had travelled that COVID-19 can survive on the soles of shoes, the firefighters sprayed the streets and disinfection mats were placed outside of the few businesses that were still open. People wore hazmat suits, gloves, masks, and other gear that are all too familiar around the globe. As isolated as Galapagos seems when it is depicted in the media, it is actually remarkably well connected to flows of tourists, viruses, invasive species, and commodities.

It is difficult to grasp the magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis in Galapagos because by the time I arrived in September 2020, many people had already left the archipelago on humanitarian flights and so the worst affected people could not be interviewed for my qualitative doctoral research. Emotionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has been traumatic: 'The virus really terrifies us and we have no idea when tourism will normalize.' One participant recounted that it was 'like Armageddon' and the 'cyber-driven panic' led to chaos and confusion as tourists tried to leave the archipelago and some got stranded during lockdown.

Although some farmers assured me that the situation in Galapagos was less dire than in mainland Ecuador because of community solidarity, food baskets, and the generally bountiful agriculture of the highlands, other participants, especially those living in urban areas, described a different reality: one of hunger, desperation and even some merchants committing suicide because they had accrued enormous debts that they couldn't pay back. Farmers suffered too, because people no longer bought as much produce and began growing their own food. Since the pandemic had caught everyone off guard, even more wealthy farmers and ranchers had recently accrued debts that they could no longer repay. For instance, one of the farm stays that I had planned for my fieldwork had to be cancelled because the farmer sold the land to pay back his debts. Hence, in most cases people were more distraught by their economic woes than by the fear of getting infected by the virus. Galapagueños explained that this was the biggest crisis of their lives, even worse than the 2016 drought, the dollarization crisis in 1999, and the devastating 1982 El Niño (ENSO).

During my research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 219 people (150 farmers and 69 individuals from other professions), all of whom had anxious stories relating to the impact of COVID-19. By January 1st, 2022, 2,321 people in Galapagos had gotten infected and 25 had died, out of a population of roughly 30,000. Two of my participants' elderly parents passed away due to COVID-19. One of the families visited their father at his deathbed and all 15 siblings contracted COVID-19 in the process, which they admit was careless, the result of losing their fear of the virus. Since children were not allowed to attend a funeral and the body was buried in an area far from the cemetery, they were distraught because they could not even give a final farewell. COVID-19 obliterated all other fears and worries to the point that multiple people

commented that they had never had any worries before the pandemic. A health professional at the Puerto Ayora hospital explained what she was witnessing:

> It really worries me how it is impacting the youth. Galapagos doesn't have many options for adolescents. They have limited options and now they're locked in. (…) My son is that age and he rarely goes out (…) There's more depression and particularly more interfamily violence. In fact, we even had a murder during the pandemic. It was a femicide and is the first known case in Galapagos (…) At the hospital there have been some attempted suicides (…) What's really weird is that people seem to have decided not to get sick. Before the hospital was full and now it's empty.

In addition to violence, suicides, and mental health issues, many people's problems were financial, because in the hopes of improving farms or expanding businesses they accrued debts which they thought they could pay back. Galapagueños felt desperate, because 'nobody thought this would happen' and although banks were refinancing loans, they still expected people to pay. Since Galapagos is the most affluent region of Ecuador, people were used to a strong economy based on the certainty that tourists would always come. As a survival strategy and emotional escape valve, some naturalist guides I used to work with ended up cultivating food on plots of land they owned in the highlands but had never had the time to work on. One guide explained:

> If we weren't doing this, we would be watching TV for six hours and would be screwed (…) One has to accept that things have changed and we have to manage things differently now (…) I think having goats is therapeutic. They're curing us emotionally. We also have meat and maybe even milk (…) My son surfs and that helps psychologically with the pandemic.

Some farmers expressed religious interpretations of the pandemic, claiming that 'the world was out of control and God needed to "reset" things,' while others took the opportunity to make dire eschatological predictions, stating that God is tired and we are approaching 'the end of time (…) we are all sinners'.

Galapagueños dealt with the crisis in a number of innovative ways, including the creation of Facebook barter pages.[7] Agricultural produce was sold via WhatsApp, small entrepreneurship projects sprouted, owners of abandoned plots of land started cultivating, urban gardening became popular, and despite feeling trapped people had more time for family and friends. Additionally, during lockdown there were acts of solidarity with the community. As one farmer explained to me:

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[7] The reappearance of barter differed from past practices, since participants would mentally calculate the precise monetary value of commodities before exchanging. This shift indicates the influence of the neoliberal ethos of individualism, rather than exchange driven solely by necessity.

Before, here in Galapagos being a farmer was to be the 'last wheel of the cart' (…) The pandemic came and so I say we're heroes without a cape. My wife and children and I one day said, 'money doesn't matter. Let's give food away to people', without thinking about money and instead thinking that tomorrow the same thing could happen to us. So, the people in the *campo* had a banana, a chicken, and were able to survive well, but people in lockdown didn't have income or as much food as us. So when we had an overproduction of pineapples we went down to town to give them away, obviously to those who don't have enough.

Some people spoke of having the opportunity to reflect upon their lives, spend time with family, get 'closer to God', or find alternative income sources. As a naturalist guide explained, the crisis had brought her closer to her network of family and friends because people had more free time and due to having less money people depended on one another. However, the majority of my participants, and particularly the most economically disadvantaged, painted the opposite picture. In some cases farmers didn't even harvest their crops and would either donate or let produce rot, because it is also too expensive to pay for transportation from the rural highlands to the port towns.

A female farmer from Santa Cruz Island explained that her husband had lost his job and since they still had debts to pay, they were unable to pay for basic services, such as water and electricity. Because their children's classes went online, they had to install Internet at home, which costs $85 per month. 'Every day is worse because there's nowhere to get money from. Nothing is sold', she explained. Even if she manages to earn $26 from sales in the market, the taxi that takes the produce down to market charges her $13, so she hardly makes any money. Luckily, her family was receiving food baskets ('kits alimenticios') from a nonprofit called 'Frente Insular' and they also ate some of the food they produce. When asked if the government[8] or the community were helping her, she said that before people were supportive, but now 'people don't share and everyone works for themselves.' Another smallholder from Santa Cruz Island elaborated on the economic and psychological impacts of the pandemic:

It has been tough. I owe the banks, because I bought my lands bit by bit and I still owe them for that. There's no work. I have animals, but we can't sell them (…) I went to the bank and they said I could refinance my debt, but it's so much interest! It's almost double (…) Nobody can deal with so much debt and no work and the fear of going out and getting sick. It has affected people economically and mentally too! (…) Some people are just thinking and thinking of where to find the money and they're going crazy.

Throughout my year in the Galapagos Islands farmers expressed different views of the future, but they all recognized that life would be more difficult now and there was no easy way out of the pandemic because tourists would return little by little. I witnessed a more relaxed attitude

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[8] The government also provided food baskets, but farmers complained about political abandonment and claimed that churches were more supportive.

towards the pandemic around Halloween and an increase in travellers during the 2020 Christmas holidays, but there was still less tourism than there used to be and so the entire society continued to struggle. People seemed more hopeful around the time when I left, in August 2021, because the vaccination campaign had been a success. Some seemed pessimistic about the global repercussions: 'Maybe by 2025 the economy will have recovered. Until then poor people [worldwide] will continue to die of hunger.' Luckily, as one participant highlighted, the very name 'Galapagos' attracts tourists from around the world; one hotel owner asserted that he was booked out for all of 2022 and cruise ships also rebooked passengers for the next couple of years. However, due to the fact that land operations involving towns had been cancelled, it is questionable whether this kind of ship tourism will actually benefit farmers and the general population. In spite of all the pessimism surrounding this, some farmers tried to remain hopeful and light-hearted:

> Since I'm smart, I'm going to make a money printing machine, but I forgot the screws so I won't able to finish it! (laughs) (…) One shouldn't get bitter. We need to be positive, no matter what happens! You have to stand up for yourself. Life goes on! (…) That's the problem. Lots of people just give up, but I'm going to continue moving forward.

The majority of Galapagueños survived the pandemic, but everyone lost something, whether it be a family member, personal finances, employment, a farm, or mental health. On the other hand, it is worth highlighting people's agency in not merely becoming tragic victims of the pandemic, but actively reshaping their lives. The concept of 'survivance' from Native American studies underscores that survival is ongoing, since the third syllable 'ance' refers to 'endurance' and a 'repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry' (Vizenor 1998: 15). Survivance has been defined as 'the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb survive, "to remain alive or in existence," to outlive, persevere' (Vizenor 2008: 19). As useful as this concept is in emphasizing human agency and the active process of surviving, it is only somewhat helpful in the context of dealing with COVID-19 and an uncertain future. On the other hand, the concept of 'coexistence' focuses on human relationships and therefore turns the question of survival into a communal act – surviving with people and with the environment.

When trying to understand how Galapagueño farmers coped with the pandemic, it is important to think about the ways in which risks can alter human behaviour and values, ultimately impacting relationships between each other and the environment – their *coexistence*. Even 'uncertainty'[9] is an insufficient explanatory concept because it relates to something being unknown or 'not certain', rather than the idea of threats and challenges, which are more closely linked to 'risk'. Coexistence implies the idea of living in relation to other humans and other species, therefore becoming the foundation for thinking about sustainability. In the remainder of this paper, I will explain how the pandemic brought back elements of a nostalgic past and how

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[9] When uncertainty 'has a positive flavour we speak of "luck" or good "fortune" and when uncertainty is tainted by dismal or catastrophic expectations we speak of "risk"' (Dein 2016: 1).

the concepts of 'coexistence' and 'risk' are essential to understanding how people were affected by COVID-19. Finally, I will explain my concept of the *coexistential rift*, which explains the negative cycle of alienation and market dependence that is created when farmers are confronted by an onslaught of threats.

Liminality, nostalgia, and the time machine

Uncertainty prevailed throughout my year of fieldwork, especially when no vaccine was available. Stunningly, due to efforts from the local government and the support of tourism companies, by June 2021 the entire adult population of Galapagos had been vaccinated. In the interim, however, my participants experienced a chronic sense of *liminality*. According to *The rites of passage* (van Gennep 1960 [1909]: 18), *liminality* involves wavering 'between two worlds', to be suspended in a different sort of time. Inhabitants remarked that the pandemic had brought back some aspects of a nostalgic utopian past that was calmer, more communal, and with bountiful agriculture. Stories of wildlife showing up in unexpected places, like a whale in Academy Bay, were part of global discourses of nature recovering during lockdown. Even construction projects to install storm drainage and sewage in Puerto Ayora were interpreted by residents in a nostalgic way, since the dirt roads reminded them of what the town used to look like. Although nostalgic narratives have been documented by other anthropologists prior to the pandemic (Ospina 2005; 2006), the difference with COVID-19 is that people felt they were actually reliving the past:

> COVID is like having a time machine, which is really cool because you can access the Galapagos of the past, where you lived more calmly with the community, had a slower routine, gave importance to very basic things – but with technology and Internet! It's like having technology and going to the past, but the problem is that you travelled back in time and took your debts with you!

This COVID-19 'time machine' revealed the kind of tranquil and harmonious coexistence that people desire for the future, while paradoxically making it more difficult to achieve, due to greater indebtedness. In other words, the lack of money is an obstacle to coexistence. During one of my farm visits, I sat on the porch and had coffee with a farmer while it rained. He reminisced nostalgically about the past:

> Here in Galapagos there's a harmony that doesn't exist elsewhere in the world, a harmony with people and animals. There was more harmony before (…) The iguana and the sea lion share the same territory. That doesn't happen in the African Savannah (…) Here you have the iguana next to a sea lion and a Sally Lightfoot is eating bugs off of them. There's a symbiotic relationship between all the animals and nobody fights over food or territory (…) [Before people] didn't fight either. Before I remember fishers going to the highlands with half a bag of *lisas* (mullet fish) to give away in Bellavista and they would get manioc in exchange.

Or if my father needed something and we'd go by motorcycle to visit a family, they'd bring out a coffee, some cheese, and so forth. We would take something to their house, and they would give us something to take to ours. There was an exchange and also we would sit and talk like you and I are talking now for hours, drinking coffee (…) Nowadays there's no time to talk, no time to socialize. It has been lost (…) I have a friend who said he would come by for a coffee and it's been seven months and he hasn't come (…) We no longer have time for friends, to chat and relive old times.

In this excerpt, the farmer's desire for coexistence is evident. Afterwards, he explained that the reason his life had become so busy was that he needed to make more money to provide his children with some of the foods and commodities that they saw on TV and the Internet. Other farmers were more blunt about the change in times, stating that 'everything runs on gasoline and without cash you can't do anything (…) Right now, women are saying, "if you have money, speak. If not, go away". Now there's no love. There's only money.' Along this same vein, a frustrated rancher explained that he was considering leaving the archipelago because 'the heart of human beings is damaged. [Politicians'] hearts go to stealing the money from the people (…) They just want to get rich, like [President] Correa did (…) Here there is no incentive to stay.'

These excerpts demonstrate that global flows have led to increasing alienation and that money has become of central importance. When the pandemic struck, it merely amplified the existing problems that the agricultural sector already had. For instance, farmers had been complaining for a long time about not being able to compete with imported goods, but during the pandemic sales plummeted. Particularly in the case of beef, farmers found themselves exploited by merchants who would pay them less, but sell at the same price to consumers. In my DPhil thesis (Stimson 2023), I go into more detail about the challenges farmers face, including lack of credit, political abandonment, an unstable climate, increasing amounts of pests, the inability to compete with cheaper imported goods, and expensive labour costs. In this paper I have mainly focused on COVID-19 and the ways in which it helps us understand a *coexistential rift,* a process that explains how compounding risks make farmers' lives more difficult.

What is the coexistential rift?

Throughout my fieldwork, participants spoke of wanting to coexist (*convivir*) as part of a small caring community that had a close relationship to the soil. They were unable to achieve this goal due to economic hardship and the pressing need to make money. Hence, I coined the *coexistential rift* as a way of describing how unequal flows of capital combined with cumulative risks have *transformative agency* and can alter human values and behaviour. It is therefore a novel way of studying risk using a causal framework.

Previous theories on the subject have been too deterministic and essentializing. For instance, Douglas and Wildavsky (1983) developed a grid-group typology to explain how *a priori*

'ways of life' relate to risk perception, while Beck (1992) developed a theory of a global 'risk society' composed of contemporary abstract and 'invisible' risks that are capable of reaching everyone in new and unexpected ways. While the former answers questions regarding why people consider some things riskier than others, and the latter distinguishes contemporary *manufactured risks*[10] (Giddens 1999) from risks of the past, neither approach offers much insight into how risk permeates everyday life. Geographers Müller-Mahn and Everts (2013) introduced the concept of 'riskscapes' to integrate both temporal and spatial elements into the study of risk, but in practice this approach towards risk remains understudied. Even the concept of 'riskscapes', which bridges the constructivist/materialist divide in the discussion of risk, does not explain how risks are part of broader natural and social processes.

The *coexistential rift* is a vicious cycle in which neoliberal capitalism creates risks that are embodied as anxieties, thus leading to increased market dependence and to human alienation from the community and the soil. More specifically, the cycle begins with the globalization of neoliberal capitalism, the amplification of an unsustainable *metabolic rift* (Marx 1990 [1867]; Foster 1997; 1999; Foster et al. 2010) that exploits 'free nature', the unequal distribution of capital, and the creation of *manufactured risks*. The combination of inequality and *manufactured risks* (which are a by-product of capitalism itself) transforms the world into a *risk society* (Beck 1992 [1986]). As a result, farmers are forced into debt peonage (Harvey 2018) and are increasingly becoming market dependent (Chibber 2022). Money becomes not simply a tool, but also 'the very embodiment of value, the ultimate object of desire' (Graeber 2001: 66), intensifying people's dependence on the capitalist system (see Diagram 1).

My ethnographic fieldwork in Galapagos clearly showed that many risks faced by farmers are a product of the capitalist system and are embodied as anxieties, altering their behaviour and leading to alienation from the community and the soil. Furthermore, I argue that psychological theories that hypothesize that there is a 'finite pool of worry' (Weber 2006) are actually discussing a finite attention span (Sisco et al. 2020: 2). Instead, I propose that anxiety is cumulative and that the resulting potentially infinite pool of worry contributes to mental health problems, which are ultimately symptomatic of a society suffering from the *coexistential rift*.

It is important to understand the nomenclature of the *coexistential rift*: the prefix 'co-' implies that we live with other beings in our surroundings, 'existential' is in reference to feelings of 'existential crisis' rather than mainstream philosophy on existentialism (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre), and *rift* should be thought of as a verb (as in rifting), rather than a noun, because the concept describes a process of cyclically tearing apart, rather than a final state of being.

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[10]*Manufactured risks* (Giddens 1999) are unforeseen risks created by humans in the process of development. Examples include nuclear disasters, climate change, and pollution. Even though COVID-19 is not 'manufactured' by humans, its invisibility and rapid expansion have unpredictable consequences.

Diagram 1: The Coexistential Rift

1 METABOLIC RIFT
The capitalist system undermines the soil and the worker, generates surplus value, but also produces inequality and a broken nutrient cycle. This is the central rupture between humans and nature.

2 CAPITALISM MANUFACTURES RISKS
Global distribution of capital increases the flow of commodities and also creates 'dreamscapes'. 'Risk winners' and 'risk losers' are created because local inhabitants must deal with the negative externalities of capital accumulation.

6. 'Infinite Pool of Worry' Hypothesis:
As the vicious cycle continues, the metabolic rift becomes more unsustainable, inequality grows, risks increase (in type, quantity, and geographic scale), people are alienated and individualized, and money becomes a hegemonic value. Hence, the coexistential rift widens over time, risks have the agency to change values and behaviors, and they are embodied as anxiety, which is cumulative and potentially infinite.

5 ALIENATION
As risks present humans with greater existential threats, they alter their behaviour and values. Human relations and human-nature relations deteriorate due to the utilitarian and individualistic logic of neoliberalism.

3 RISK SOCIETY
Seemingly invisible, these risks have unexpected consequences across space and time. In addition to being reified by scientists and the media, and interpreted differently depending on one's cultural schema, they also have very real material impacts.

4 MARKET DEPENDENCE & DEBT PEONAGE
To increase security and reduce the negative impacts of risks, making money becomes the central objective. Neoliberal logic is internalized and is hard to escape, as people become indebted.

The elements in Diagram 1 are explained in more detail as follows:

1. **Metabolic rift (Marx 1990 [1867]; Foster 1997, 1999; Foster et al. 2010)**: In *Capital* (1867), Marx explains that 'all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil (…) [and therefore] undermining the original sources of all wealth' (Marx 1976: 638). Moore argued that the *metabolic rift* 'stands out as one of critical political ecology's most powerful ideas' (2011: 39) when applied to world-ecology[11]. My participants commented on how bountiful the soil used to be decades ago (both on the mainland[12] and on the archipelago) when their avocados and watermelons were huge, but currently they depend on artificial fertilizers[13]. Even though this is a large-scale process that explains the origin of capitalism's unsustainable relationship with Nature,

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[11] 'World-ecology' is a global interdisciplinary conversation about capitalism as an 'ecological regime' (Moore 2011: 2). In other words, capitalism is a product of the 'web of life' (Moore 2015) and is not just acting upon nature.

[12] The depletion of the soil, lack of well-paid job opportunities, and natural disasters on the mainland are linked to migration to Galapagos.

[13] Essentially, '[m]odern agriculture has become the art of turning oil into food' (Foster 2010: 81).

in the context of Galapagos the idea that human depletion of the soil is the source of socio-ecological problems is only partially true. In the archipelago, since it is cheaper to produce food in mainland Ecuador, the soil and the worker from the mainland are being 'robbed' and exploited when food is imported. Hence, when thinking systemically about the *metabolic rift* in Galapagos, it is important to note that the *metabolic rift* lacks the explanatory power for why farmers are becoming alienated, and instead is part of the vicious cycle of the *coexistential rift.*

2. **Capitalism manufactures risks (Wetherly 1999)**: Although it was argued that *manufactured risks* are created by the 'very progression of human development' (Giddens 1999: 4), as Wetherly suggests, the 'deeper connection is to capitalism' (1999: 223). In other words, when a factory produces a commodity at the expense of 'free nature', which it pollutes, the contamination becomes a risk that local communities must deal with, while the companies responsible can extract profit and leave. In Appel's ethnography of an oil rig off the coast of Equatorial Guinea, she introduces the term 'modularity' to describe the ways in which companies seek frictionless profit and disentanglement, even though they are 'deeply implicated' (Appel 2012: 706) and rely upon local conditions to run their businesses. Marx would have considered this as an example of how the essence of money is to erase the ways in which both labour and land are implicated in the creation of its abstract value and how the system itself leads to expanding towards new frontiers of exploitation. In the case of Galapagos, large tourism companies seek to expand profits, but little money reaches the inhabitants. Instead, as Galapagueños like to highlight, the tourism ships just leave the rubbish behind. This is part of neoliberalism's logic of 'internalizing profits and externalizing risks' (Nixon 2011: 35) both spatially and temporally. The money that does reach the community ends up enticing farmers to leave their farms in search of more profitable work. Furthermore, more imported goods to feed tourists lead to the unintended arrival of introduced species. Beck explains that often '[s]ectors that had nothing or very little causally to do with the production of the threat (…) are also among the most affected (…) [and the world is split] into risk winners and risk losers' (1999: 64).

3. **Risk society (Beck 1992 [1986]**): According to this 'world-systems' approach, modernity has *manufactured risks* (Giddens 1999) that 'complement and accentuate one another…[and] where hard-to-manage dangers prevail instead of quantifiable risks' (Beck 1999: 36). Beck explains that three elements of global risks are: delocalization, uncalculability, and non-compensatability (Beck 2008: 1). Under contemporary 'reflexive modernity' people feel 'bouts of existential anxiety' (Beck 1994: 46), are 'obsessively preoccupied with apprehension of possible risks' (Giddens 1991: 53), and are unable to act upon pervasive anxieties (Lupton 2013: 89). Although Beck's 'grand theories' have been critiqued as Eurocentric, not based on empirical evidence, or overly simplistic when dealing with cultural complexity (Dickens 1992; Irwin et al. 1999; Mythen 2004; Voorst 2015), from

STIMSON, *Farming paradise*

my ethnographic evidence it was clear that Galapagos farmers are increasingly worried about abstract *manufactured risks* that are made visible to us by the media, such as COVID-19 and climate change.

4. **Market dependence and debt peonage (Chibber 2022; Harvey 2018):** Prior to the pandemic, smallholder farmers were already affected by numerous challenges to their everyday lives, so they recurred to high interest loans. Despite practicing some degree of subsistence farming, they became increasingly market dependent (Chibber 2022). As Harvey (2018) points out, global financial mechanisms have made sure that '[w]e are all locked into a system of debt peonage' (2018: 437). Furthermore, as neoliberal capitalism is practically ubiquitous, even in remote places like Galapagos people are highly concerned about making money. Even though farmers on Galapagos are perhaps less market-dependent than other sectors of society, new *manufactured risks* like COVID-19 lead people to focus on making money to survive. Arguably, this situation leads farmers to become members of the *precariat.* As Standing (2011) explains, the *precariat* is a new social class where people must think short term because of the four A's (anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation), and live in 'chronic insecurity' (2011: 20). In other words, as neoliberalism focuses on 'transferring risks and insecurity onto workers' (2011: 1), it alters human values and behaviours – colleagues become competitors and gardens (*chakras)* are reconceptualized as businesses.

5. **Alienation (Marx 1990 [1867]**): Marx's concept of alienation evolved throughout his writings. Musto (2010: 82) summarizes the four ways in which alienation is defined: '(1) from the product of his labour, which becomes "an alien object that has power over him"; (2) in his working activity, which he perceives as "directed against himself", as if it "does not belong to him"; (3) from "man's species-being", which is transformed into "a being alien to him"; and (4) from other human beings.' While all are relevant for capitalist critique, in this paper I focus on the latter two forms: human alienation from the environment and from each other. Evidently, these forms of alienation are also interrelated with human alienation from labour and the product itself, but my ethnographic evidence suggests that the consequences of the ongoing crisis are making Galapagos farmers less communal and more likely to treat the soil as a business. Since alienation is closely linked to anxiety (the embodiment of risk), it is important to note that risks have amplified existing structural inequalities, thus acting as a form of 'slow violence' (Nixon 2011). Another way of understanding this form of alienation is to consider Graeber's concept of 'baseline communism' (2011: 98) as the foundation of human sociability and interpret the *coexistential rift* as an attack on this, replacing it with selfishness and individualism. In other words, both alienation and anxiety are the visible symptoms of the damage done when people are confronted by risks and have become both indebted and market dependent.

6. **Infinite pool of worry hypothesis:** Psychologists Linville and Fischer (1991) suggested that people have finite emotional resources for coping with worry because they prefer experiencing negative events separated in time, an idea which Weber (2006) turned into the 'finite pool of worry' hypothesis. Nevertheless, a recent publication (which Weber also co-authored) explains that there is 'no conclusive evidence' (Sisco et al. 2020: 2) for this hypothesis and that instead people have finite attention spans, meaning that there's 'a limit to how many threats we can dwell on or address at a time. However, this does not mean that unattended worries have reduced intensity if they are brought to our attention again' (Ibid: 17).

The *coexistential rift* is a process that explains the unique connection between neoliberal capitalism, the creation and distribution of *manufactured risks*, market dependence, debt peonage, cumulative anxiety, and alienation. Contrary to terms like survivance and belonging (*arraigo*), my concept helps explain the ways in which risks like COVID-19 are inserted in people's lives and alter human behaviour and values. Farmers are confronted with a *treadmill syndrome* (Eriksen 2016), where they must struggle harder just to survive. Furthermore, Eriksen (2016) also reminds us that Gregory Bateson's (1972) *schismogenesis*, or what he calls 'runaway processes', are 'mutually reinforcing growth processes which eventually lead to collapse unless, as Bateson points out, a "third instance" enters into the process and changes the relationship' (Eriksen 2016: 21). Hence, it is important to note that unless something changes in the vicious cycle of the *coexistential rift*, this may lead to a gradual collapse of the archipelago's agricultural sector, which is a trend already predicted by Sampedro et al. (2020), who estimated that 75% of the food supply was transported from the mainland in 2017 and by 2037 that number may increase to 95%.

Although it seems obvious that the metabolic rift and capitalism itself create risks that increase alienation and anxiety, I have not encountered this argument articulated in this way before, potentially because there are 'scholars who assert that Marx is really passé, especially after the dismantling of the Soviet Union' (Patterson 2009: ix) and so it is unusual to combine Marxist concepts with risk theories. For instance, Giddens claimed that 'Marxism, as we all know now, has lost most of its potency as a theoretical perspective on history and change' (Giddens 1996: 366) and Beck stated that:

> With the end of the predominance of Marxian theory, the century-long petrification among Europe's intellectuals has been lifted. The father figure is dead. In fact, only now can the critique of society get its breath back and see more clearly (Beck, 1999: 79).

Although Marx's historical materialism is deterministic and reductionist, that is no reason to disengage with all of Marx's ideas. It is noteworthy that Beck (1999) overtly presented himself as anti-Marxist even though 'Beck's work is indebted to Marx's' (Curran 2016: 21). Beck's theory of the *risk society* refused to link itself to Marxist ideas, possibly because admitting the importance of *class* 'would undermine the possibility of a general solution to the problems of society through

a single solution' (Ibid). Regardless of the reasons why risk theory and Eco-Marxist approaches have not been combined previously, the *coexistential rift* provides a framework for investigating and understanding not only the experience of smallholders in Galapagos, but also the causal effects of *manufactured risks* like COVID-19 on a worldwide scale. Furthermore, it may be possible that the *coexistential rift* has always existed at some level in other contexts, but nowadays the cycle is accelerating and overheating (Eriksen 2016), thus amplifying anxieties and risk to the point of existential crisis.

Conclusion

Based on my ethnographic fieldwork in the Galapagos Islands, in this paper I have argued that the central problem in the archipelago is not the lack of a cohesive culture, but instead a twofold attack on people's identity: inequality and the *conservationist paradigm*. Within this context, it is difficult for people to form a sense of belonging. Although Bocci (2022) is correct in observing that older farmers do have a sense of *arraigo* and nostalgia for the past, during the COVID-19 pandemic I observed farmers struggling with compounding challenges and focusing their time on making money to pay back debts. The 'geographical opening' (Grenier 2007 [2002]) of the archipelago in the 1940s is probably irreversible, as global flows will continue to arrive to the islands.

Instead, there should be an effort to rethink how humans coexist on the archipelago and actively support farmers. Many present-day problems were identified decades ago (Bonilla 1998; Chavez 1993) and solutions have already been suggested by other academics, such as involving farmers in policymaking (Laso 2020), subsidizing local produce, taxing imported goods (Viteri 2017), and addressing systemic inequality (Salcedo 2008). Additionally, I think the problem of expensive labour and lack of capital could be solved through low interest loans and potentially creating a new migratory category for farm labourers and subsidizing those costs. The farmers I spoke to are tired of talking to academics conducting studies that create no viable change in their livelihoods. Equally, they have complained that the more powerful sectors of society (politicians, conservationists, and the tourism sector) should not just think about increasing profits, but should also care about the community. Ultimately, Bocci (2022) is right in that we need to strengthen a sense of belonging to achieve a more sustainable archipelago, but this cannot happen unless we recognize the struggles that people are currently facing. In order to reverse the alienating effects of the *coexistential rift,* we must not just focus on survival, but on coexistence.

Acknowledgements

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DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN COVID-19: IMPROVISATION AND INTIMACY

AKIRA SHAH[1]

COVID-19's uncertainties have reminded researchers of how improvisation is both an inherent and a limiting aspect of ethnographic practice. The pandemic also generated a rise in highly improvised digital ethnographic research, producing fresh questions on the domain's relative ability to realize social intimacy with participants. I reflect on both pre-fieldwork and fieldwork experiences between November 2019 and September 2021, while considering what it means to fail and succeed with improvisation during the outbreak. By extension, I ask when improvisational practice should be abandoned to balance a researcher's affective survivance in the field. I additionally explore several challenges and advantages found through improvising to digital ethnography. Focusing on material affordances and digital ecology, I review some of the benefits its mediation yielded over everyday community dynamics, while considering digital life as relatively complex and resource dependent. Nonetheless, with COVID-19 further shrinking the analog-digital divide in everyday life, I suggest a greater urgency for ethnographers to treat digital intimacies as equally legitimate and insightful as their analog counterparts.

Keywords: Ethnography, digital-mediation, improvisation, intimacy, COVID-19

Introduction

Improvisation. It can be defined as 'the action of responding to circumstances,' doing so 'spontaneously, without preparation, or on the spur of the moment' (OED 2022a). Conducting fieldwork during the original COVID-19 outbreak served as a potent reminder of both its inherent role and limitation in the practice of ethnography. This is because, to borrow the words of another anthropologist, ethnography necessitates 'an uncertainty that is lived, experienced, felt – at times debilitating, at other times liberating' (Calkins 2016: 46). In addition, as an act of methodological 'survivance' – understood here as 'the ability to continue' (Vizenor

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2008a: 19) – improvising amid the pandemic led many researchers to abruptly adopt digital modes of ethnographic research. This has generated new waves of reflections over the relative effectiveness of digital experience in realizing 'appropriate' levels of social intimacy. Nevertheless, despite the novel temporalities caused by the pandemic, the considerations and debates they invite are anything but new. In this article I explore both these themes while reflecting on my own experiences of digital ethnography, improvising in response to COVID-19.

Strictly speaking of course, *ethnography* – a 'theory of description' (Nader 2011: 211) textually rendering 'social worlds' (Abu-Lughod 2000: 261) of and between humans, or, documenting psychological and subjective experiences that 'both shape, and is shaped by social and cultural processes' (Hollan 2001: 48) – is not a method, but the final product of several. In addition to participant observation, it is commonly supplemented via a range of other qualitative and quantitative methodologies, as comprehensively outlined by others (e.g., Bernard 2018). This article reflects solely on participant observation (i.e., ethnography's core) and interviews.

When to improvise?

Demonstrated through older epistemological conflicts between ethnography as a scientific versus artistic or technical practice (Malkki 1997), improvisation has been long identified as a key cornerstone of its craft. Such analysis can be traced back to at least the 1930s in anthropology (e.g., Firth 1936), where it was stressed as central in permitting a creative aspect to data construction, while simultaneously balancing it with some form of evidence (e.g., what, or how someone did, said, embodied). This train of thought flew in the face of popular positivist approaches to social scientific research, as well as the very ideas of 'evidence' and 'science' (Whitehead 1967). As previously described by others, the issue with empiricism in anthropological approaches to ethnography is that its standpoint is 'a working principle' (Firth 1936: 18). This, in essence, provoked the conclusion that ethnography is a fictitious product, yet *not* one of fiction.

Later established as a simultaneous empiricist and improvisational method, some considered the latter as one of three fundamental co-existing ethnographic practices, alongside critical theory, and everyday ethics (Malkki 2007: 164). This is because mastery of single or multiple methods are indispensable, yet ultimately insufficient to the production of ethnography. Rather, they are only techniques, or tools of the art itself, the art being their improvised synthesis through a thorough understanding of the context/s in question. This is not to be confused with a static agreement on how improvisation 'should' be accomplished, and neither is it to suggest ethnography is conducted in the absence of any rules whatsoever. Instead, it is that 'improvisation *is* the tradition' (Malkki 2007: 180, my emphasis).

COVID-19 forcibly reminded many ethnographers of this tradition's significance. Moreover, it simultaneously explores its pragmatic limitations, shedding light onto recent, yet pre-COVID-19 (hereon 'pre-COVID') discussions on what it means to fail in the field (Mattes and Dinkelaker 2019). Both proved true for me. On one hand, it is what enabled me to successfully readjust my approach to the pandemic. Yet, on the other hand, multiple instances

of failure along the journey – 'the journey' including both pre-fieldwork and the following year in the field – forced me to question when and where improvisation reaches its limit.

Original fieldwork arrangements appeared settled around November 2019. A work visa agreed, I was to be stationed as a Teaching Assistant at a school in Saitama Prefecture (Japan). Researching a recent expansion of *International Baccalaureate* (IB) across the nation-state's education sector, the school had introduced a predominantly Japanese-mediated version of the IB's Diploma Programme,[2] an internationally recognized curriculum and qualification for entry into higher education. An ethnography of the programme's everyday life for students, parents, and facilitating faculty in the school's community was to act as the heart of my doctoral research. The arrangement felt ideally suited. A formal position would permit a highly participatory approach to participant observation,[3] easy access to an otherwise slippery visa, and direct financial support via a subsidized salary that would cover most of my fieldwork costs. Despite having never hired an employee outside of Japan before, the school demonstrated generous support by working through an exhaustive list of steps outlined by the Japanese Government's Immigration Bureau on recruiting processes.

The visa procedure was formally initiated in February 2020, but soon stalled once mainstream news and popular media across the world lit up with fear over a highly contagious, deadly, and fast-diffusing disease. True to the fears of virologists, it would later realize one of the most perilous global pandemics in recorded human history. Unsurprisingly, ethnographers conducting fieldwork around this time described intense feelings of fear and 'despair' (Hidalgo and Khan 2020: 190). Given such extraordinary and unsettling circumstances, it was mutually agreed that travel to Japan was no longer in the interest of safety for either those in the school community or myself. This was my last interaction with the school for the remainder of my doctoral degree, all but eradicating months of preparation and early rapport.

At this stage, living in a student dormitory at St. Antony's College in Oxford (UK) during the March 2020 national lockdown, I had emphatically failed to improvise. There were two reasons for this failure. First was the inability to establish access to a viable field-site, with a blanket closure of schools enforced across Japan. Even when they reopened several months later, all potential schools remained understandably hesitant to permit my travel, even during the intermittent windows when relevant laws and the political climate allowed it. Of course, should that barrier have been somehow surmounted, there remained the moral dilemma of proximity (Strong et al. 2021). Could I live with being potentially responsible for my own body (i.e., the predominant research tool of any ethnographer) causing the serious illness, or worse, death of another in the name of research? Such a nightmare scenario paralyzed me.

This neatly leads into the second reason: my own state of mind. Feeling disappointed was difficult when failing to locate alternative field-sites. COVID-19 was spreading at a particularly alarming rate in the UK at the time. Streets were eerily silent, and soon accompanied by horrific statistical data on infection and mortality rates through a host of mainstream news networks, popular media, and key informative bodies, including the UK's

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[2] This initiative is officially termed the Japanese Dual-Language Diploma Programme.
[3] I partially highlight this to acknowledge approaches to participant observation deemphasizing participation (e.g., Jeffrey and Troman 2004: 545), as part of increasingly hyphenated practices of ethnography across the social sciences (Scott-Jones and Watt 2010) influenced by a dynamically shifting knowledge economy (Mills and Ratcliffe 2012).

National Health Service (NHS) and World Health Organization (WHO). Regular access to distressing accounts from one family member working on the frontlines in the NHS only added to the anguish. The college I resided in was now largely deserted. With over 80% of the student body comprised of non-UK nationals, many promptly departed on flights home fearing incoming lockdowns and travel restrictions, in a number of cases leaving most their personal belongings behind. This ironically left a safer environment for those who remained, though it did little to improve the general atmosphere of shock. For a time, my research no longer mattered. Neither did my degree.

Such practical, psychological, and moral limits had been met by countless other researchers, including within my primary cohort at Oxford University's School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography (SAME). Several paused research pursuits immediately, some for almost two years. At certain departments around the world these intermissions were institutionally forced, with, for instance, ethics boards shutting down altogether. Those who continued at SAME were generally restricted to a handful planning fieldwork in rare, unaffected areas of the world where COVID-19 had – at the time – dissipated, or those managing to retune their methodological approach. For the latter, some adapted in creative ways by synthesizing elements of digital methodology, although data would often remain scarce, unable to be exclusively relied on. At this point I was none of the above, for I had failed to improvise at all.

This bitter reality invited a thought: what does it mean to fail in fieldwork? It had been the subject of much discussion among anthropologists and ethnographers not long before COVID-19 (e.g., Takaragawa and Howe 2017). Indeed, many of the difficulties facing ethnographers are well established. Gaining necessary ethical clearance from relevant bodies can be problematic. Even when successful, other ethical considerations, such as what constitutes a fair or reciprocal relationship between ethnographer and participant, can remain disquietingly cloaked. Arranging access to an appropriate field-site or community can be fraught with obstacles (Ortner 2010). The risks of accumulating too much data to constructively manage can be *as* dangerous as gathering too little, a notion my doctoral supervisors were often keen to stress. Delving into and interpreting one's forest of data can feel overwhelming, aimless, or theoretically unrewarding. Capturing the lucidity of life experiences through ethnographic description can prove elusive (Hovland 2007: 1). Certain methodologies can prove challenging to execute, or fail to realize appropriate results (O'Brien 2010: 5-9). It is, however, considerations over the various affective demands that fieldwork exerts on the ethnographer, that particularly resonated with my journey (Stodulka et al. 2018).

Improvisation from physical to digital ethnography ultimately proved successful. That said, this success was punctuated by multiple moments of failure. This is because the ability to adapt to the field is a dialectical process. To be realized, *both* ethnographer and their environment/s of focus must sufficiently attune to permit it. A myriad of ramifications wrought by COVID-19 demonstrates the role of context, as it is mostly impervious to a researcher's influence, no matter how experienced or skilled. Meanwhile, discussing the former's role means not only being prepared, but actively encouraged to acknowledge where one reaches their limits as beings. After all 'if any anthropological fieldwork went *strictly* to plan, it would

actually have to be considered a failure' (Mattes and Dinkelaker 2019: 229, my emphasis).[4] Some degree of failure is therefore not only necessary for success, but often responsible for molding it.[5] I discovered new contexts to approach my research questions because of a period of psychological disillusionment caused by COVID-19, *because* my original plans proved fruitless.

On a hunch, I shifted ethnographic focus from IB programs at schools to IB teacher training programmes at universities in Japan. I also steered away from exploring the relationship between universities and national government, and instead on the former's ties with the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). These decisions were little more than gambles, hedging my bets that should the temporal climate continue to hinder any chance at in-person ethnography in Japan, that universities and international organizations stood a better chance of surviving digitally. It paid off, with these respective parties making unprecedented choices to operate in either fully digital or, less commonly, hybrid formats. Schools, on the other hand, did neither for any extensive period when reopened. As a bonus, my futile attempts at securing a relevant visa, and the moral dilemma of exposing myself and others to COVID-19 in the name of research conveniently evaporated. I resultingly completed a one-year digital ethnography while based at a university dormitory in Oxford between September 2020 and 2021. The field successfully attuned to the ethnographer.

However, this methodological *survivance* – to draw on a concept expanded on by other anthropologists (Vizenor 2008b) – was accompanied with significant sacrifice. Developed in the context of Native American studies, survivance stories are commonly renunciations of 'detractions,' 'obstruction,' and 'tragedy,' while conversely being celebrations of 'continuance' (Vizenor 2008a: 1, 19). In this context, however, survivance acknowledges *both* adversity and perseverance. When personally reflecting on the former, for example, transitioning to digital fieldwork resulted in a crushing loss of funding from a foundation focused on Japan-related research. Provisionally awarded in June 2020 under the assumption I would be physically in Japan, a year later (i.e., towards the end of my fieldwork period) the committee decided they could not finance 'purchases not associated with fieldwork directly in Japan.' This left me in a financially vulnerable position both during and after fieldwork.

Another demanding hurdle lay in acclimatizing to nocturnal life. As someone who had never experienced night shifts before, doing so for a year while in strict isolation amid a volatile COVID-19 climate was utterly exhausting. Even when a nocturnal rhythm was somewhat realized, maintaining it proved equally difficult for the remaining year. This was further complicated by having to repeatedly arrange for a physical arrival in Japan, staying alert for a sudden switch to physical fieldwork that never arrived. This inability to switch was caused by a combination of factors, ranging from a blanket ban on foreign nationals between late-December 2020 and February 2021, several State of Emergency declarations by the Japanese

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[4] I emphasize 'strictly' here to acknowledge that ethnographic fieldwork is naturally capable of following very closely to plan. I simply argue it impossible for all contingent aspects (e.g., how a field-site changes over time, how a participant's behaviour alters over time, how the ethnographer feels over time), to be impeccably forecasted.

[5] It is also worth highlighting that 'failure' sometimes *equates* to success. An interview that went poorly, for example, can itself prove highly instructive (e.g., understanding why it went poorly could reveal profound insight for a given socio-cultural context).

Government, and the mass outbreak of the Delta Variant in the UK. Most critical, however, were the eventual decisions made by relevant universities and organizations to retain digital operations.

My journey – alongside those of countless other ethnographers – emphasized not only the ecological limits of improvisation, but also the affective limits of individuals. Keeping track of one's emotions had never felt more important. More anthropologists have been doing this in general, sometimes compartmentalizing them into separate journals altogether (Stodulka et al. 2018: 525-527). I accomplished this through short audio recordings, finding it easier to reflect on personal feelings verbally. This exercise helped to keep my subjectivities in check with ethnographic data, while informing me of how well I was affectively coping with the field. At times, the truth was that I was not. Despite an essentially seamless integration to digital life across the Asia-pacific, extreme prolonged physical isolation in Oxford was taking its toll on my well-being. On some nights this translated to feelings of discombobulation, handicapping my social awareness. Digging deep into mental fortitude miraculously saw me through such periods, but for a number of months post-fieldwork the side effects of this push became clearer. A vaccine finally in hand, I accomplished little more than basic human functions as I slowly returned to life with the sun.

Acknowledging and empathizing with loss from COVID-19 is important. That said, there are several positive outcomes the pandemic has inadvertently achieved. To emphasize but one of these here, it has exposed many of our often-concealed human vulnerabilities, underscoring a need to better reflect on, and describe the successes *and* failures that go into maintaining ourselves in the field. My experience confronted me with an uncomfortable, and hopefully stimulating enigma. Did I succeed because I persevered through an arduous year of fieldwork? Or did I fail because I sometimes willingly chose to neglect my own self-care to realize this 'success'? Perhaps COVID-19 can act as a timely debate for researchers to consider the potential risks of championing the former, and potential benefits of critiquing the latter lines of thought.

Taking digital intimacy seriously

Rays of sunlight glazed the curtains as I rolled out of bed. It was the end of December 2020, and my first time rising with the morning since initiating fieldwork in September. Term ending for the new year holidays in Japan offered a brief respite from nocturnal life. I was soon to attend a *nomikai* ('social pub') event of around 15 students affiliated with a university I pseudonymously refer to as the Japanese Institute of Education, or JIE. Organized for the late evening in Japan, it was a rare instance when participant observation would take place during my morning in the UK.

Following arrangements via a group chat on Japan's mainstream messaging app, LINE, I grabbed a bottle of ginger ale from the fridge before settling down at my desk and initiating Zoom. As a general non-drinker I was somewhat relieved. It would have been risky at best, and anti-social or disrespectful at worst, to avoid consuming at least some form of alcoholic beverage had the event taken place at an *izakaya* ('Japanese-style bar'). Thanks to the event

occurring digitally, however, all of us were tucked away in family houses, flats, or dormitories. Some would swig through as many as six cans of beer during the four-hour session that followed, while others made do with a glass of wine or water. A few decided to smoke, another blessing in this format. At present, few, if anyone, can escape becoming a second-hand smoker when socializing at an *izakaya*, or most other types of dining establishments in Japan. As a non-smoker often experiencing unpleasant physiological effects through inhalation, it was refreshing to be in control of my air. The usual pressures of integrating into the socio-cultural norms of a single environment dissolved. Instead, all were sharing separate environments catered towards their preferences with everyone else, creating a new (Ahlin and Li 2019), more inclusive environment.

After exchanging greetings in the main room, the central organizer suggested splitting people into breakout groups between three and four, alternating participants every 30 minutes. We all agreed, repeating the process between three to six times, with some leaving Zoom earlier than others. Utilizing breakout sessions in this way also revealed its benefits to a physical setting. There was no need to filter one's hearing or strain one's voice over the ambient noise of an establishment. In addition, the group enjoyed chances to socialize with all its members, where physical limitations often constrain individuals to only converse with a select number. Conversations spanned a wide array of topics, ranging from IB, teaching careers, and educational policy to family life, popular entertainment, and desires in life. My engagements provided multiple moments of humor and contingency. Some jested with their pets. Others kept an observant eye on their toddlers off-camera while maintaining a veneer of calm. A couple, after drinking a generous amount, turned deeply philosophical, disclosing personal insecurities with life through introspective yet often amusing tales.

These *nomikai* were arranged by students in exclusively online spaces due to overarching fears and anxieties with COVID-19. They also acted as a gesture of respect for those unable to reside in the same city because of regionalized lockdowns. It was a time when physical isolation was fervently encouraged, and when 'the home' transformed into the most consistent place of everyday socialization with the world. Yet, despite this improvised environment, such gatherings deepened bonds in ways impossible in-person. Experiencing these sometimes-profound moments of social intimacy made me reflect on the connection between digital domains and human relationships. After all, if the quality of a given ethnography is largely, if not entirely dependent on how socially intimate an ethnographer is with their community(ies) of interest – as other anthropologists suggest (Funk and Thajib 2019) – then how might this be influenced by its mediation? By 'mediation,' I refer to two specific domains in which realities are constructed: the *digital* and the *analog*.

I choose 'analog' purposefully. 'Physical' is more commonly used as a contrasting term to 'digital,' although analog is also used by digital theorists (e.g., Elwell 2014) and anthropologists (e.g., Gadsby 2016). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), analog can be defined as that which is 'typically contrasted with digital' while also designating 'the original or traditional form of something that has a digital or computer-mediated counterpart' (OED 2022b). The same is essentially true of physical, and remains an entirely appropriate alternative. However, *unlike* physical, analog carries a more colloquial sense of *a way things used to be* (OED 2022b). The idea then, is that its use might further stimulate social scientists to

challenge the paradigmatic treatment of its relationship with the digital.

As is now well-established, much of humanity continues to grapple with a mistaken conceptual compartmentalization 'between the virtual and the real' in the growing wake of *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Elwell 2014: 234). This persists despite the fact that digital reality and experience, as discussed at length by other anthropologists, is equally capable of being as 'real' or 'unreal' as its analog equivalent (Boellstorff 2016a). Simply put, digital life should be no more or less ontologically legitimate to its analog counterpart. Treating both domains as such is becoming increasingly obvious in anthropology and broader social science, although, as pointed out by others, even experienced researchers of digital domains struggled to grapple with this reality from as recent as the mid-2010s (Boellstorff 2016b: 387-388). Change imposed by COVID-19 has re-energized discussion about the role of digitality among social scientists. Early examples of post-COVID-19 (hereon 'post-COVID') literature paints a mixed picture of how ethnographers have treated digital life, with some continuing to analyze it as a phenomenon somehow less legitimate than its analog other.

The deployment of 'remote' helps demonstrate this trend. A casual glance at its associations in the OED are immediately concerning: 'far away,' 'indirect,' 'opposed to immediate or proximate,' 'divergent,' or even 'unfamiliar as if through distance; foreign, alien' (OED 2022c). Such definitions evidently treat it as something incapable of realizing close, direct, intimate, or familiar human connection. Yet, it is precisely terms like 'remote fieldwork' or 'remote ethnography' that remain at risk of being synonymized with the digital and online. For example, one ethnographer more recently carried out a mix of analog and digital ethnography in Nepal, concluding that while '*remote* ethnography' constructed new forms of intimacies (e.g., text-based intimacies via social chat apps), it was ultimately unable to compensate for what offline fieldwork lost (Jaehn 2021). They were cautious with their use of remote as a descriptor, using it to describe experiences after switching to digitally mediated research. In their own words, they found 'online spaces as rather limiting and inappropriate in sustaining the intimate relationships that had been possible offline' (Jaehn 2021). In this scenario, online spaces had failed to realize little more than *remote* experiences.

Like the example above, much post-COVID ethnography existing at the time of writing is generally comprised of research conducted both before *and* after the outbreak. This fact alone is significant, as they stand in sharp contrast to a rich range of ethnographies conducted pre-pandemic that mostly, if not exclusively draw on digital-mediated experiences. This is easily appreciated through several volumes on digital ethnography (e.g., Boellstorff et al. 2012; Pink et al. 2016; Hjorth et al. 2017) and the established subdiscipline of digital anthropology (Horst and Miller 2012). They collectively demonstrate a growing range of contexts where analog mediation instead becomes the compromised or less relevant alternative. For instance, various anthropologies and ethnographies of metaverses, such as Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) environments, showcase scenarios where everyday social dynamics can only be coherently appreciated within digital spaces (e.g., Boellstorff 2009; Nardi 2010). The same is true of ethnographies blending digital and analog aspects (e.g., Malaby 2009; Gadsby 2016; Bluteau 2021a). More recent post-COVID digital research, on the other hand, has often been dramatically improvised. As the experience of others highlights (e.g., Jaehn 2021), the sheer scale and abruptness of improvisation can be prone to failure, if 'failure' is

defined as an insufficiency of social intimacy with participants. That said, others conducting fieldwork around this juncture conversely enjoyed success in this respect, exemplified well by one ethnographer's account of their sudden departure from their physical field-site:

> But social life did not wholly disappear with the arrival of Covid-19. Rather, it began to adapt and to take a new shape, even while also falling back into some of the rhythms that we were already accustomed to. The bonds and life I'd built in Máncora did not disappear either, instead they shifted into new configurations that allowed me to glimpse at things I hadn't and couldn't have seen before. (Hidalgo and Khan 2020: 190)

Others have since provided a more detailed reflection over the various pros and cons that may accompany digital fieldwork for social scientists (Howett 2022). Howett's experience with digital interviews during their extensive research in Ukraine strongly resonated with my own. For example, an interesting tendency for participants to better express their personal selves when situated in familiar environments (Sullivan 2012: 55-57; O'Connor and Madge 2017), or the adverse effects that a lack of internet speed and other material affordances (Nardi 2015: 18-19; Kaptelin and Nardi 2012) can exert on everyday digital experience. They also emphasize a greater need to treat the field as something not 'limited to a geographic space with people and places "on" it,' but rather 'as a continuum of spatio-temporal events and relations between people in diverse sociopolitical contexts' (Howett 2022: 396). This conceptual step is imperative if digital ethnography is to be treated equally with its analog other. Incidentally, it was precisely this older definition of 'the field' that was responsible for the loss of my previously mentioned grant, while it was this proposed alternative that permitted my transcendence of analog geography. Despite an ethnographic focus on JIE, I also collected material from several other universities, gaining comparative insights that would have been otherwise impossible to attain in-person owing to their physical separation from one another and JIE. Furthermore, I could ignore national borders entirely while at the IBO, conducting a participant observation of its relevant administration that spanned the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

Once more, however, remoteness is evoked, this time through the notion of 'remote embeddedness' (Howett 2022: 394). The idea itself is a valuable one, describing a successful social integration into the lives of participants via digital mediation. Yet, precisely because of this success, the semantics of 'remote' are conceptually juxtaposed with the concept of 'embeddedness,' distorting how digital distance is experienced both relationally and geographically. As such, *digital embeddedness* may better describe the notion. In addition, a conceptually problematic distinction is made between what is referred to as the 'mediated' versus the 'in-person' (Howett 2022: 387), inferring that the latter is somehow unmediated. Naturally, all human reality and experience, analog or digital, *must* be mediated. Analog mediation is also susceptible to interferences in quality. For instance, humans diverge considerably in their sensory abilities (e.g., one's sight or hearing), impacting the type or quality of data gathered and described by a given ethnographer. That said, digital mediation is certainly more complicated. If the analog is defined as that which is solely mediated through our bodies, then the digital is this plus the various material affordances required to generate it. Aside from internet accessibility, reliability, or speed, some of the most immediately obvious and often

cited examples include ICT skills, as well as hardware and software familiarity (e.g., Deakin and Wakefield 2014; Lobe et al. 2020). Falling short on any of these aspects and more, digital experience quickly turns unpleasant and inorganic. Assuming the ethnographer's senses are fully functioning, social interactions deteriorate to levels incomparable to most analog interaction.

Interruptions to the fluidity of digital life were rare during my fieldwork, but often severely disruptive when surfacing. Community coherence differed greatly depending on how competent and comfortable people were with using digital platforms. A few of my interviews, typically averaging around two hours in length, were reduced to as little as 20 minutes due to poor internet connectivity, turning casual discussions into vexing encounters. Poor connections or a lack of competence could lead to wide-ranging issues, such as where a participant's voice is only partially captured, or worse, when my own response is received long after having expressed it. These instances of intermittence and time-lag[6] disturbed the expected fluidity of organic human interaction, encouraging those involved to abandon conversation relatively quickly.

Then there were more substantive limitations. Video conferencing apps like Zoom, for now at least, can overly systematize groupwork and activities. By essentially restricting people to clinical, turn-based monologs, it obstructs natural junctures of interruption often taken for granted with analog equivalents. Another barrier related to the broadly inescapable lack of geographical mobility. Especially where fixed webcams or laptops are concerned, we remain broadly constrained by the visually static environments they create. A total reliance on digital mediation rendered me unable observe discourse before, between, and after classes on the analog campus between students and staff, as well as the broader environment of JIE itself. I could not capture analog activities beyond the rare instances when a student might briefly guide me via a smartphone. However, as it transpired, COVID-19 dramatically limited such informal exchanges, as the students who attended hybrid classes in-person were encouraged to leave campus promptly once lessons ended.

In the light of this, it is tempting to conclude that ethnographic data quality is contingent on the standard of material affordances generating it. This leads to what was the most peculiar methodological finding from my fieldwork. A series of events occurred when a lack of stable connections paradoxically *enabled* a deepening of social intimacy. The principal example of this involved early classes at JIE. Having made the decision to run its entire programme in a mostly digital and otherwise hybrid capacity, the institution sometimes struggled to execute classes as desired due to unstable internet connectivity, later upgrading its hardware infrastructure to help address the issue. The result proved unexpectedly valuable for participant observation during hybrid classes.

Picture the scenario. The facilitator's laptop acted as the host for the Zoom room, its camera positioned to ensure visibility of the physical classroom. Those participating in-person simultaneously connected their devices – principally laptops – to the Zoom session, integrating with their digital-only peers. For this format to be successful, the institution's internet had to support the facilitator's laptop and student devices inside the physical building, *as well* as those

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[6] I do not mean to infer such intermittence or time-lag as a uniquely digital characteristic. For instance, it was also a feature of old analogue telecommunication, especially across long distances.

of each individuals' residences participating online. It was problematic then, that JIE's internet could occasionally be severed entirely. This would naturally cause all devices reliant on its network to lose connectivity. To people such as myself, JIE had disappeared. However, *only* JIE disappeared. In other words, those relying on internet networks independent of JIE's lingered on Zoom, reconfiguring a new social environment. Marooned in cyberspace, this fresh setting caused all still present to laugh, an ethnographer's blessing. Having barely initiated fieldwork, it immediately broke the ice with multiple students. The moment granted a precious opportunity to re-introduce myself to others informally, for them to speak frankly about initial impressions of the course, and establish a level of familiarity not attained with others until many months later. Eventually, after about 20 minutes, connection was re-established with JIE, teleporting us back into the classroom and forcing us to immediately retune ourselves to more formal etiquette. This example demonstrated one of a few bizarre occasions where poor material affordance enhanced social intimacy and embeddedness with participants.

In hindsight, my field-sites of interest were best accessed digitally, to the extent that a solely analog ethnography would have failed to yield sufficient data for my doctoral thesis. This is because the various communities of ethnographic interest were themselves digitally constructed, with only a handful of participants ever meeting in-person. A combination of COVID-19 variables dramatically impeding physical interaction, along with a focus on students (i.e., customers), university staff and organizational representatives (i.e., employees), allowed both the resources and impetus for participants to embed themselves into digital lives. This was complemented further by a general rise in ICT competencies – especially among younger generations – allowing many to express themselves in an equal, if not sometimes better manner to how they would in analog life (e.g., De Seta 2020). A key reason for my experience contrasting with several other post-COVID examples lies with the fact that, while tantalizingly close, my fieldwork had not been initiated when the outbreak occurred. I was forced to replan, or, at the very least, wager accordingly with knowledge of the pandemic.

In the end, digital mediation turned out to be the normal approach, while analog mediation became the experimental alternative, a paradigm shift which should no longer be considered new (Bluteau 2021b). As a final example to illustrate why, others described a phenomenon coined the 'always-on' webcam in relatively low resource localities well before the pandemic (Miller and Sinanan 2014: 54), writing the following in primary reference to Trinidadian society:

> As the technology has become more reliable, it is also possible to simply leave webcams on in the background, while going about one's general household activities such a cleaning, cooking or studying, without directly paying attention to the other person, remaining aware of where they are and what they are doing. (Miller and Sinanan 2014: 55)

Forced to acclimatize to digital modes of learning, teaching, work, and everyday socializing in ways otherwise challenging or impossible due to the COVID-19 landscape, such always-on or on-for-a-while moments emerged on various occasions. Aside from *nomikai* events, interviews conducted with select participants lasted for an average of five hours with cameras on. This was not because we had five hours-worth of formal content to discuss, but rather that we

chose to converse in between taking breaks, preparing drinks, relaxing quietly with some reading, or conversing on topics of ordinary interest to them. Similar events also transpired through casual chats with select participants.

Since completing fieldwork, participating universities and the IBO – including their various conferences held exclusively online at the time – have since broadly moved back to analog life. This has, in most cases, led to a return of community dynamics where the everyday is predominately experienced in the analog realm. Digitally mediated attempts at understanding the same institutions at present would fail to realize consistent levels of social intimacy, a striking reminder of ethnography as a fundamentally situated experience. Nevertheless, COVID-19 caused, for a time, digital ethnography to be *the* approach in achieving the deepest possible level of social embeddedness with relevant communities and individuals. This is regardless of whether the environment was centered on a classroom, staff meeting, accreditation process, conference, texting app, or a laid-back chat over drinks.

Conclusions

As COVID-19 has vividly demonstrated, ethnography *requires* uncertainty.[7] Precisely because of this, improvisation is integral to its practice. Equally, however, the pandemic's extraordinary scale of disruption exposes the limits of improvisation, while revealing the intrinsic role failure plays in realizing successful ethnography. Moreover, the affective demands thrust onto the ethnographer by the outbreak, and the extent one does or does not cope under exceptional circumstances raises uneasy ethical questions. It calls for a methodological understanding of survivance, one that balances a researcher's mental and physical health with perseverance. COVID-19 has additionally revealed the difficulties in realizing consistent levels of social intimacy within greatly improvised digital spaces. These obstacles are multi-faceted, ranging from material affordances to censorship, from ICT literacy to suitability. Regardless, as my tale of digital ethnography during the pandemic exemplifies, the analog-digital distinction to human intimacy is fast shrinking, inching ever closer to towards transmediated experience. Accordingly, an ethnographer's ability to shift fluidly between these spaces has never been more pressing.

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[7] Or, if this feels overly definitive, ethnography *entails* uncertainty.

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UNDER PRESSURE AND VOICING UP: JAPANESE YOUTH TACKLING GENDER ISSUES

PEYTON CHERRY[1]

During and since the #MeToo Movement in 2017, Japan, especially Tokyo, has experienced a surge in activity from grassroots groups like Voice Up Japan and Chabudai Gaeshi Joshi Action as well as student-driven sexual consent projects at universities such as Waseda. These groups work to tackle the issue of sexual violence on campuses and beyond. The category 'gender issues' (or *gendaa mondai*) encompasses many conversations Japanese youth are having now, particularly regarding changing gender roles and expectations in home, work, and school spaces. This article will examine the current discourse around gender issues contextualised in precarious Japan to examine youth community building and meaning making assigned to spaces of both passive and active participation. I suggest that 'voicing up' in Tokyo is defined not so much by 'loud and proud' or 'post-closet discourses' (Ueno 2022, Seidman 2002), but by local discourses adapted around trending terms and raising initial awareness. This article shows that smaller-scale community involvement, rather than styles of protest activism, is shaped by both institutional and individual narratives. The 'passing on' of such narratives is essential for youth to enact 'survivance' (Vizenor 2008) and find belonging in different groups. In addition to my fieldwork which begun in September 2022 and will end around September 2023, I will engage with existing literature on how precarity in Japan is usually discussed in terms of irregular work (Allison 2013), intimate disconnections (Alexy 2020), and queer narratives. I will use these sources in combination with the personal experiences of my interlocuters to unpack how youth 'voice up' and become involved in groups focused on preventing sexual violence against women, LGBTQ awareness, and anti-discrimination.

Keywords: Gender issues, sexual consent, LGBTQ, youth, social movements, grassroots activism

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Introduction

There is a 'gateless gate' (*mumon no mon*) for visitors, students, faculty, and staff to come and go as they please. Since its founding, the university grounds have been defined by a 'grassroots spirit' (*zaiya seishin*). The social body of Waseda University (more colloquially known as 'Sōdai') has been defined by diversity, inclusivity, and freely embracing alternative ways of thinking. Physical manifestations like the *mumon no mon* are symbols of Waseda as well as of an immaterial *zaiya seishin*. However, in the past few decades, student voices have struggled to recapture and redefine these original founding messages.

In my primary field site at Waseda University in central Tokyo, groups of students aged from their late teens to mid-twenties 'voice up' about issues such as sexual harassment, the lack of awareness of LGBTQ+ people, and discrimination based on gender, race, or ethnicity. Waseda University is a prestigious private institution founded in 1882 by Okuma Shigenobu. It is known for its' high-performing pupils, multiple spacious campuses, and a large student population with an increasing percentage coming from overseas or international backgrounds. Within Japan, Waseda, along with Keio University, University of Tokyo, Kyoto University, and other institutions with a high *hensachi* (standardised rank score), are household names and symbols of educational attainment. Waseda students, undergraduate and postgraduate, are often considered exceptional because of their ability to pass the challenging entrance examinations and later be hired on by influential companies in fields such as politics, banking, journalism, and technology.

From the outside, Waseda might appear to be a bastion of liberalised, internationally minded individuals and of urban higher education. The symbolism within the *mumon no mon* is a perfect example of advertised inclusivity and of an image of progress. But the narratives of individuals and groups here are not representative of Japan, the Kanto region, or even the greater Tokyo area. Other structures are at work in determining the makeup of this university and many others. Roger Goodman and Chinami Oka (2018) point out in their analysis of the *hensachi* system's influence that it 'upholds the ideology of educational meritocracy and consolidates structural inequalities in Japanese society', because access to resources *does* impact the type of support students may receive to study and get into a senior high school or university with an impressive *hensachi* ranking (594). The emphasis on such ideologies is alive and well in the 2020s, sneaking into conversations I've had with faculty, staff, and students who hint at the divisions by social class (and likely gender) that they perpetuate.

Despite Waseda University's privileged positioning in Japanese higher education, I argue that examining the context of student gender-issue based activism which emerges from these elite Japanese universities aiming for a more 'globalised' image provides opportunities for the investigation of Japanese youth grassroots organisations. Contrary to the external messaging of taking consistent steps toward progress, these institutions are struggling with

embedded discourses of patriarchal masculinity and associated political conservatism. Examining these institutions from the bottom-up perspective requires further disentanglements when placing concepts like 'voicing up' and precarity within growing local discourses around sexual consent education and discrimination based on race, gender identity, or sexual orientation. These well-endowed institutions which mobilise conversations around consent and LGBTQ+ rights earlier than some of their neighbours remain a web of contestation, of uncertainty, and of survivance.

Japanese youth I've spoken with at Waseda University, the International Christian University (ICU), and the University of Tsukuba are facing similar problems when attempting to enact change at universities, whether joining hands with external organisations, working alongside like-minded faculty members, or utilising both sorts of connections for social campaigns. In the case of the sexual consent project at Waseda University, student members continue to work with dedicated faculty who can vouch for their project to colleagues as well as providing guidance on the contents of student-produced materials. It is through these collaborative efforts, a form of 'horizontal coordination' across numerous emerging groups (Shibata 2020) like that observed in off-campus protests around youth unemployment and workers' rights, that Waseda students across two circles (the local term for student clubs) have produced their consent handbooks and developed workshops.

The effort is not officially backed by the university administration, including the student activity affairs office who will not advertise one student circle's project over another's to avoid displays of preferential treatment. By virtue of being only loosely affiliated with a university and kept afloat by the action of a small number of full-time students, the sexual consent handbook project faces limitations to visibility. This contrasts with larger-scale social movements in Japan which were founded by students but moved their activities off campuses, such as the Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs) movement from 2015 to 2016 which I will discuss in more detail later.

Speaking about issues like sexual harassment and violence, toxic masculinity, and gender inequality in any country is not easy. Especially because it often involves turning a private matter into a public affair. But the experiences and the narrative storytelling that emerges from encounters with discomfort—whether in the form of unwanted physical contact or an uncomfortable conversation with friends—demonstrate both an uncertain reality and a potential for survival. If we engage with ideas of 'survivance' (Vizenor 2008) the continuity of 'voicing up' about stories of harassment, violence, and the absence of these discussions in public venues is what can bring positive change to Japanese youth. Sharing these narratives allows marginalised groups—like victims of sexual violence (psychological or physical) and members of LGBTQ+ communities, to renounce myths around their own experiences and retell stories as their own. It is therefore a 'renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry' which echoes Gerald Vizenor's idea of native survivance (2008: 1). Ultimately, greater public awareness towards the 'common sense' occurrence and

narrativisation of violence and discrimination can transform activities at the university level and beyond.

In this introduction, I explore the notion of a 'precarious Japan' and how it interacts with youth community involvement as well as student grassroots activism, particularly in the case of elite Japanese universities such as Waseda. In the next section, I investigate how social pressures produce narratives among young people, with a focus on constructions of femininity, masculinity, and androgyny. In the third section, I will expand on these themes by using examples of queer experiences from my own and other authors' ethnographic data. And, lastly, I discuss whether intimate community spaces and 'voicing up' will produce new opportunities for minority groups, especially LGBTQ+ individuals, in Japan.[2]

Defining a 'new' precarity in 'voicing up'

The notion of precarity is common in discussions of labour, aspirations, and class. It is often wrapped up in care and support networks, be they provided by the state or by community and family. But states of 'precariousness' typically emerges when these networks and resources fail people and they become 'differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death' (Butler 2009: ii). It can be a slow degradation or a steep decline into instability, such as full-time work turning into irregular employment and delayed pay. Precariousness is by no means unique to Japan, but it gained particular attention following the bursting of the 1990s economic bubble, leading to discussions about a 'society marked by social disparity' (*kakusa shakai*) for the Japanese public. The long-standing social issue covered by media is that Japanese youth who pursue typically corporate white-collar career paths are no longer able to attain the full-time, system of lifetime employment (*nenkō seido*) that their parents and grandparents benefited from. But this isn't the full story. Japanese youth are and continue to mobilise in distinctly different ways from their predecessors.

Nonregular workers, especially the disproportionately affected female temporary workers, are resisting unfair dismissals and transfers (Shibata 2020). Traditional models of protest around labour policies and opposing the passage of legislation are being discarded in favour of utilising fashionable streetwear brands to garner youth interest and by spreading messages on social media like Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Precarious labour has not disappeared, nor has the precarity I will discuss regarding gender issues in student activism,

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[2] I will draw upon both primary and secondary ethnographic research about gender and sexuality in Japan, focusing on discussions around sexual minorities, sexual harassment, and gender inequality across higher education and grassroots spaces. Profiles of individuals and other examples of 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) come from my own fieldwork at university campuses in Tokyo and neighbouring cities like Saitama, Chiba, and Kanagawa. All individuals will be pseudonymised to prevent direct identification. The fieldwork incorporates long-term participant observation along with semi-structured interviews, attending events and workshops, and reading handbooks and SNS posts produced by students and faculty about gender-related issues.

but there have been rapid shifts in discourse around previously silenced topics and muted groups.

When using the term 'voice up', I refer to the use of this phrase by grassroots organisations in recent decades, especially from the late 2010s on. On the opening page of their website, one such organisation, Chabudai Gaeshi Joshi Action (Chabujo), describes their goal to create a world where everyone can live as themselves and express their thoughts freely. Translated from the original Japanese, they write that: 'People who "want to change today's society" are connected to their values by dialogue, and by speaking up and taking action together, we will eliminate the power disparity.'"[3] The emphasis on raising one's voice (*koe wo ageru* or *koe wo dasu*) is based in the grassroots organisation's understanding that, for women living in Japan, there is 'difficulty in voicing up' (*koe no dashinikusa*). 'Voice up' could also be translated into speaking up or speaking out, but there is something to be said for the decision by many groups, including Chabujo, to emphasise the presence or absence of a voice for women and other marginalised groups. For the non-profit organisation Voice Up Japan, it has become its name as well as its mission statement. At the end of the group's history page on their website is a clear connection between 'equality', 'inclusivity', and 'safety' when it comes to 'voicing up.'

> Our work has just begun. We will continue to do all that we can to build a more equal and welcoming society in Japan—a society where everyone feels safe to voice up.

Although I will not include the entirety of the original Japanese here, the phrase 'koe wo ageru' (Voice Up) is explicitly used. This may clarify to the reader that the somewhat commonplace Japanese phrase is being adopted by this movement and organisation to serve as a call for action, for societal betterment, and for promoting anti-violence and anti-discrimination in Japan.

The need to recognise and elevate muted thoughts and opinions, to 'voice up', has clear similarities to Vizenor's theories of survivance. Gerald Vizenor describes this as, 'an active sense of presence… the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction' (2008: 1). The stories I've encountered in Japan for and by minority groups. It is a distinct form of survivance from that experienced by Native Americans in the United States. The efforts of Japanese social movements and organisations attest to a similar legacy of resistance and identification which moves beyond tragedy or victimhood. It often leads to finding community and to creating new bonds of friendship and family. Survivance in this Japanese youth context may then be a key to alleviating what we could refer to as gender uncertainty or precarity.

Sharryn Kashmir notes the different debates around precarity, marking distinctions between an ontological discussion and one attributing precarity to neoliberal capitalism.

[3] Chabujo.com, (accessed 1 Oct 2023), https://perma.cc/4TD5-TFT6

Whereas Butler and Allison are categorised as leaning into the emotional landscape of precarity, Kashmir identifies common themes of 'disenfranchisement, displacement, and uncertainty' and 'anxiety, insecurity, and feelings of un-belonging' in both cultural anthropology and in discussion of Fordism (2018: 3-4). Butler ties gender performativity to precarity, as gender norms designate that 'those who do not live their genders in intelligible ways are at heightened risk for harassment and violence' (2009: ii). This is undoubtedly the case in Japan as it is many other societies where the 'normal' is embraced and the 'deviant' is stigmatised. An important takeaway from these dialogues when looking at precarity for Japanese youth involved in gender issues is the emphasis on *feeling*.

Anne Allison (2013) was one of the first anthropologists of Japan to bring precarity into the idea of an overarching 'precarious Japan.' Allison and others' discussion of precarity ties in with the crisis in labour forces, the increasing normalisation of 'irregular' (*hiseikikoyō*) workers who are temporary, short-term, or contracted (ibid: 46). Interestingly a 'precarious Japan' can be and has been applied to many other debates and cultural phenomena. This includes the demasculinsation and fragmentation attributed to *otaku* (dedicated fans or 'nerds' of popular Japanese media) following the collapse of post-war, bubble economy era Japan, connecting them to individual quirkiness, obsessiveness and even depravity (Toivonen and Imoto 2013). It is not difficult for the authors to then connect the 'youth problem' focus of *otaku* to *hikikomori* and NEET debates.

However, precarious labour and everyday living is also filled with contestations and landscapes of resistance, laid out meticulously by authors such as Saori Shibata (2020). Shibata uses a sociological lens while describing the historical progression of Japan's current political economy and the concurrent shift in protest events by workers, especially 'nonregular' or 'irregular' workers. In a more contemporary volume than Allison's, Shibata demonstrates that the methods and models of protest, from pay-claims to infringements of workers' rights, have changed steadily from the late 1980s through to the early 2000s and even more so during the Abe administration. She argues that the 'increased frequency with which protest events conducted by NPOs and citizen's groups occurred also reflected the changes affecting Japan's political economy' (2020: 57). Such protests, often arranged through horizontal coordination among multiple unions and issue-oriented groups, are clearly a form of 'voicing up.' Though the changed shape from traditional models of 'pay-related claims by organised labour' to ones which are horizontal and community-organised, often by geographical region, emphasises how malleable protests and general activism can be. Notably, Chabujo and Voice Up Japan use 'community organising' as a focus of their campaigns for gender rights.

It is uncommon—but not unheard of, for Japanese university students to set off a large-scale social movement, particularly focused on or around a physical campus. When student movements are created, it is in spite of university cultures which discourage political engagement. There is a widespread belief that such grassroots activism may be distasteful to corporations and decrease students' chances of success during the *shūkatsu* (job-hunting) season (Falch and Hammond 2020: 441-442). But there have been exceptions to this modern

trend. In 2015, Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs) movement mobilised against the national defence security policies of then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). This was an astonishing example of student mobilisation and activism, especially as they used urban, cyber and hybrid spaces to express their opposition against administration policies which would permit the self-defence forces to move more freely abroad (ibid: 437). SEALDs used this diversity of spaces and promotion of inclusivity, including many women in their leadership, to appeal to a greater variety of youth in Japan.

In the end, the group did not prevent the passing of the legislation it was fighting against, but it did increase social consciousness and awareness. SEALDs proved that Japanese youth today are employing new strategies to achieve greater media coverage, appeal to wider audiences, and normalise new brands of activism differentiated from both their predecessors in Japan and movements overseas. Former member of SEALDs, Wakako Fukuda, described the struggles in an interview five years after the group's disbandment as primarily coming from 'the inability of many to understand that they have rights' (Banerjee 2022). But she expressed an understanding for the reason 2020s activism still involves carefully chosen words and that: 'It is not hard to speak in front of a thousand people. It is harder to speak to your neighbour or friend' (Fukuda in Banerjee 2022).

Resistance and rejection—or silence, are common, particularly when they are tied up in an institution's administrative processes. With every success story, there are failed campaigns whether to distribute pamphlets or change a policy. But it is still worth highlighting positive changes that come with the effort and dedication of students, staff, and faculty alike. An example was the establishment of the Gender and Sexuality Center at Waseda University in 2017, the first of its kind at any Japanese university and the by-product of an initial student proposal in 2015. Or the successful petition by students at International Christian University (ICU) to produce and distribute consent handbooks to incoming students. The first batch of pamphlets were handed out to the Autumn 2022 intake of students with the goal to make sexual consent a 'normal' part of first year orientations.

A recipe for gender issues, an opportunity for dialogue

A frequently invoked saying is 'the nail that sticks out is hammered down' (*deru kugi wa utareru*). This is a 'common sense' (*jōshiki*) phrase which is repeated in many conversations and interviews I have with Japanese undergraduate and graduate students as we try to untangle why it is so difficult to bring about change, especially regarding gender issues. Toyomi used this phrase when explaining more broadly why social movements and activism in Japan may struggle to gain popularity. An observation was that 'in other countries, activists are very famous everyone knows [them] and they become very popular'. Whereas, in Japan, even activists playing a big role or putting in a lot of effort are not afforded the same recognition,

or appreciation, perhaps because: 'People don't really care about activism and social issues. They're, like, okay with what we have right now.'

The Lost Decades (1990s-2010s) (*ushinawareta sanjyuunen*) are a prime example of how economic stagnation can lead to not just ten but up to 30 some years of uncertainty in employment, housing, and, indeed, finding a life partner. Japan is sometimes classified as an 'uncertainty avoidance culture' which expresses itself through a lower tolerance for ambiguity as well as for 'people or groups with deviant ideas or behaviour' (Hofstede 1979: 395 in Kobayashi et al 2008: 418). Kobayashi mainly analyses deviance in terms of activities such as gambling, physical violence, drug use, illicit sex, property destruction and theft. Which leads me to ask if my informants at Japanese universities might consider forms of community involvement like anti-harassment campaigns and LGBTQ+ societies a type of 'deviant behaviour'? This could mean that getting involved with anti-discrimination groups such as Voice Up Japan or Chabudai Gaeshi Joshi Action, or educating fellow students about sexual consent, is seen as a risk-taking action.

Voice Up Japan (VUJ) is a non-profit organisation founded in 2019 after a magazine called *Shukan SPA* published an article identifying by university which young women were easy access for sex. VUJ's founder, Kazuna Yamamoto, started a petition on *Change.org* which gathered 40,000 signatures. It was enough to prompt the magazine to issue an apology. Since then, VUJ has organised multiple conferences and seminars to speak out about gender inequality, sexual violence, and misogyny in Japanese society. One of their main methods of doing so is through their many university branches with their work on projects such as sexual consent, anti-harassment, HIV/AIDs awareness and distribution of period products.[4]

Chabudai Gaeshi Joshi Action (Chabujo) is also a non-profit which promotes gender equality and speaks out against sexual violence, especially violence against women. They were founded in July 2015 by Sachiko Osawa and their activities have continued into the present day. The phrase 'let's make a society where we can all live as ourselves' (*jibunrashiku ikiru shakai wo tsukuro*) is an important part of their organisational logo. Made up of different teams instead of the multiple student branches which define VUJ, Chabujo is involved primarily in community organising campaigns. This includes providing educational workshops about topics such as bystander intervention, creating sexual consent handbooks which have been distributed to many schools, and digital outreach through their blog, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook feeds.[5]

These organisations became more visible following the formation of the #MeToo Movement in Japan in 2017. This began in earnest when journalist Ito Shiori went public about

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[4] This passage is adapted from Voice Up Japan's Japanese and English websites under the 'Who We Are' and 'Our History' pages. To learn more please follow this link: https://www.voiceupjapan.org/en/who-we-are/, (accessed 3 March 2023), https://perma.cc/H7S3-2XZ5.

[5] This description of Chabujo is also adapted from their main website (in Japanese), which is accessible here: https://www.chabujo.com/ (accessed 3 March 2023), https://perma.cc/4TD5-TFT6.

her sexual assault case.[6] Ito's case resulted in a flurry of negative backlash as well as positive support, which have been analysed by media studies specialists Yan Tan and Shih-Diing Liu. Tan and Liu (2022) defined online news comment sections as 'alternative public spaces that allow divergent political views' and identified practices of 'witnessing' in the form of 'victim-blaming', 'feminist' and 'reformist' digital footprints. As might be guessed by the categories' names, 'victim blaming' put the responsibility for the assault on Ito's shoulders, 'feminist' responses said Ito was in the right for speaking up and it was her assailant's fault, while the 'reformists' dissected the incident as a failure of institution, of government, and society (ibid: 6-10). Tan and Liu's analysis of public reaction and conversation is a perfect example of the diversity of opinions on even a single 'scandal' like Ito's. Even as this paper seeks out individual narratives it is still vital to remember that their perspectives are often not representative of broader public opinion. Much of the people I speak with consider themselves in the minority whether due to their educational level, sexual orientation, or involvement with activism.

In a remote interview in August 2022, Toyomi, a representative of the Voice Up Japan (VUJ) International Christian University (ICU) branch, explained how he personally got involved.[7] He said that it wasn't until he entered university that he began to think more deeply about gender issues. A seminar at ICU and conversations with a current VUJ member are what spurred him to join projects around HIV and sexual consent education. These external opportunities for conversation aligned with internal, more personal, feelings he had about gender, specifically conceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Toyomi identified 'toxic masculinity' as one of his primary concerns, along with joining an HPV vaccination awareness campaign and involvement with VUJ ICU's sexual consent project. Traditional views of masculinity were the personal impetus for him to get involved with gender issues in Japan, as he described a sense of discomfort around the expectations of male behaviour, especially as he entered university. He did not think this feeling was unique, but that most Japanese men are trapped in these patterns of behaviour. For Toyomi and others, acting on that feeling—and against social norms, takes considerable effort.

Kumiko Endo (2019) has examined how contemporary singlehood plays into new gender stereotypes, specifically of the idea of 'herbivore-type' (*sōshoku-kei danshi*) and 'carnivore-type' (*nikushoku-kei danshi*) men. Increasingly, this impacts the dating game and marriage hunting (*konkatsu*) fields in Japan as what heterosexual individuals are looking for in a partner do not match up with what is represented in the dating pool.

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[6] Ito Shiori and her colleagues who started the face of the movement in Japan later rebranded it as #WeToo when the #MeToo model was met with reticence and negativity from even fellow victims of sexual harassment and assault in Japan. Ito and others found it was much easier to garner support as a group rather than use the publicised accounts of individual victims. Typically, overseas models of activism must undergo changes and localisation to fit different cultural frameworks.

[7] All names of individuals have been pseudonymised or anonymised. Even where interlocuters have given permission to have quotes attributed to their real name, I have referred to them by different names or initials. The mention of the organisation, university and gender identity/sexual orientation is still necessary to define the interviewee's social position in the context of this paper.

The young (20s to 30s) single women in Endo's study expressed that 'someone who is not a herbivore' is a suitable person to have as a partner (2019: 175). This is usually women desiring men who would be proactive and take the initiative in a relationship. But many women lament the short supply of such men. Instead, women have had to become 'carnivores' to make up for the 'herbivorous' men who are not pursuing them. This has been in the Japanese dating rhetoric since around 2006 when the terms *sōshoku-kei danshi* and *nikushoku-kei danshi* were first coined by columnist Maki Fukusawa (ibid:174). For social scientists, these newer expressions of masculine norms may be indicative of a paradigm shift, at least in behaviour if not attitude. It may *not* be a shift in cultural attitudes because, as Endo suggests, Japanese women still desire men to perform traditional gender roles, to be assertive and decisive, as well as someone with a stable job. But the social and economic climate of today has made it harder to find such a partner. And, therefore, some Japanese women turn to finding these qualities in a foreign man.

In the notion of otaku sexuality, we see again debates and concerns over what a masculine, mature, even 'normal' young man is. These labels of otaku, NEET, hikikomori, and more recently, *sōshoku-kei danshi*, typically problematise youth through various mainstream discourses. As Toivonen and Imoto phrase it: Youth are frequently viewed as a threat to the established order, as unstable agents, and as insufficiently socialised 'semi-citizens' who need further training and moulding in order to play adult roles (2012: 17). Cultural anthropologist Patrick Galbraith (2014) discusses the association of male otaku as 'failed men' who are not sexually interested in 'normal' women or even in human beings (210-11). Critics of male otaku, and it is important to emphasise that these are critiques levied against men who enjoy two-dimensional characters rather than the women who do the very same, point to these members as being socially immature, selfish, and irresponsible. Their 'deviant desires' are 'taken to be a rejection of socially (re) productive roles and responsibilities' (ibid: 210). And, because they lack the right kind of masculinity they are often described as 'effeminate' or 'like a woman', an unfortunate by-product of patriarchal discourse in not just Japan, but many other countries. The best way to put down a man is to say he is like a woman.

These examples of *sōshoku-kei danshi* and male *otaku*, of alternative masculinities, are important to note because they have and still do contribute to the pressures put upon male Japanese youth. Scholarly and journalistic debates feed into what young people like Toyomi are saying about how there is an overwhelming pressure for men to perform with confidence, with forcefulness. If they do this, they then embody a type of *desirable* masculinity. There exists a need to not only be a masculine man in the eyes of Japanese society, but also what a partner would expect and, presumably, want. The main issue that Toyomi identified had to do with personal image, with the maintenance of the image of a masculine male who is masculine through 'having a girlfriend'. And to get a girlfriend they act a certain way, even if it means 'acting like a different person' (*betsu no hito ni mitai ni*).

Toyomi's comment also implies that young Japanese men change their behaviour between being with their friends and being around a potential romantic or sexual partner. He

mentioned that this mentality also excludes gay men, who are lumped into the category of, paraphrasing Toyomi: 'inexperienced males who have no girlfriends and therefore no sex.' Through just this short breakdown of a masculine image most Japanese men are immediately left out—be they 'herbivore-type men', otaku, or members of the LGBTQ+ community. These excluded groups, especially LGBTQ+ individuals, will be the focus of the rest of this paper.

Connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting

Masculine or feminine norms do not dissolve quickly, but there is a distinct importance placed on 'awareness' in Japanese campaigns for gender equality. To 'raise awareness about the importance of building relationships on mutual respect and the significance of sexual consent' is also the goal of groups like Chabudai Gaeshi Jōshi Action (Kyodo News 2019). Emphasis on 'raising awareness' may resonate with the 'consciousness raising' collectivities of earlier women's movements where women found strength and political purchase in identifying common experiences, particularly in sexual abuse (Burns 2005: 11). Ideas of dispelling dominant ideologies and building and organising community are a foundation for these grassroots organisations. The few consent discussions which occur in Japan stress the idea of personal boundaries and space. Respecting the boundaries of others is an absolute must for consent outlined in the handbooks produced by Chabujo and the Waseda sexual consent project team. An example of this stance is in the sexual consent handbook produced in 2018 by Chabujo which states: 'non-consensual sexual words and actions are sexual violence' (*doui no nai seiteki gendou wa seibōryoku desu*). Chabujo is not the only organisation to turn this statement into a more common refrain. Even with variations in phrasing and word choice, as well as the resources groups have at their disposal, such messages strike a similar chord. In the sexual consent handbook produced by the Waseda student team and which began distribution on campus in March 2022, a key phrase on page 5 is: 'Any sexual words and actions which haven't received sexual consent are sexual violence' (*seiteki doui ga torareteinai, seiteki na gendou wa subete seibōryoku desu*).

Language and semiotics clearly play a role in starting, advancing, and stalling dialogues around social issues like gender. New and popular terms designate categories for types of romantic partners, occupation status, and association with certain hobbies. In Japan, much effort is put into distinguishing the active and the passive, the public and the private, while in-between spaces (and people) slip through the cracks. Occupying a less-recognised space or position or possessing a 'minority' identity is certainly a manifestation of the precarity discussed by Allison, Kashmir, Shibata, and Endo. This typically gendered precarity is characterised by social exclusion and isolation. As it has been for generations, connecting with others appears to be the impetus for finding a place to belong (*ibasho*) and a purpose or cause to call your own.

A shared narrative is that finding these communities involves discovering more about individual identities. Through encounters with VUJ members at ICU, Toyomi questioned his past and current discomfort with the masculinity performed by himself and his friends. By visiting Waseda's Gender and Sexuality Center, or joining an inter-university LGBTQ+ circle, students can safely explore their gender expression, gender identity, and sexual orientation. And, for people who have experienced *chikan* or other forms of harassment, the campaigns of organisations like Voice Up Japan, Spring, Chabudai Gaeshi Jōshi Action, and Human Rights Watch, is an opportunity to know one is not alone. That your doubts, fears, and uncertainties are shared, even mirrored, by many others.

When it comes to gender, there are many ways people have adopted to transgress typical and heteronormative boundaries in a way which is tolerated, if not accepted. In Japan, a female-embodied androgyny (Robertson 1992: 419) witnessed among female players of male roles (*otokoyaku*) in the Takarazuka Revue, a famous all-female theatre troupe, are a prime example. And androgyny is not just accessible for Japanese women but for Japanese men. In fact, it originated with men cross-dressing and performing femininity. Traditionally, this may be expressed through the *onnagata* (male players of female roles) in Kabuki theatre, but it is also easy to see the appeal of androgynous features in Japanese popular music, manga, anime, and fashion. Jennifer Robertson dedicated years of ethnographic research to the interplay of gender, sex, and sexuality in the Takarazuka Revue. But, as Vera Mackie notes in her own work on gendered displays in Japan, such examples of public, open transgression are often restrained to the entertainment industry (2010:116).

To describe what going against gender expectations means off stage, Mackie uses the example of Nōmachi Mineko, who transitioned from male to female while an office worker and wrote an autobiographical account about her experiences (Mackie 2010: 111). Nōmachi is primarily concerned with passing when it come from presenting as one gender to another, but Mackie makes a point in her analysis that 'the narrative of how one individual born in a male body acquired a feminine gender identity can also shed light on more mainstream performances of femininity and masculinity' (2010: 113). Nōmachi rejected the wearing of a necktie and left the life of a salaryman. For Nōmachi, wearing a necktie was an unbearable and detestable experience. Such a rejection of this postwar Japan symbol of hegemonic masculinity could be performed by even a cis-gendered man. But its symbolic association with masculinity is further emphasised by how much Nōmachi wished to feel and present as more feminine. A single article of clothing can hold so much power thanks to the image of a masculine man as one who is the primary breadwinner (*daikokubashira*), working long hours in a corporate environment to provide for his wife and children.

With androgynous gender performance (or practice) it was acceptable if it did not permanently transgress certain boundaries. For example, masculinised females, the *otokoyaku*, in the Takarazuka Revue were described as *chūsei* (being neutral or in-between) or *ryōsei* (being both). Robertson suggests that this assigns performers an asexual state as well as to 'deflect negative attention from both the sexual difference… and the social ramifications of

that difference' (ibid: 429). Such a social ramification might be that the love female fans have for the *otokoyaku* would cross over into 'real-world' same-sex attraction. However, androgyny in the Takarazuka Revue, in youth fashion visible on city streets, or even in 'girls' love' during school years, is not always attached to sexual orientation or gender identity.

In fact, the expectation that androgyny is a fleeting experience not to be taken seriously creates complications for transgender people like Nōmachi and nonbinary or X-gender (a Japanese term designating a more fluid gender identity) youth. Before transitioning and then passing as a typical Japanese OL (office lady), Nōmachi describes presenting and being 'accepted' as an effeminate man in university who could be perceived as androgynous or 'ambiguous' (Mackie 2010: 116). She was able to exist with this identity before entering adult workspaces. Living her university life without being identified or 'outed' as queer was perhaps made easier by more recent narratives of the *sōshoku-kei danshi*, a man who was not an idealised form of 'masculine', at least, not what some young single heterosexual women desired for their potential partners. Instead, the palpability of this persona of Nōmachi's, which was not defiantly queer, seemed dependent on the temporality of the androgynous state. Queerness, including androgyny that *is* connected to LGBTQ+ identities, remains contested in Japan. It was not the focus of my conversation with Toyomi because he did not indicate he was a member of the community. Although, he did acknowledge the discrimination and exclusion from Japanese masculinity faced by gay men because they did not date women. Automatically, LGBTQ+ males were left on the wayside, not considered in conversations about toxic masculinity and the pressure young Japanese men feel to flirt aggressively with women, especially under the influence of alcohol.

In the gay dating world as well, there are pressures to apply heteronormative ideologies and use stereotypical identities in the form of 'types' (*-kei*). This is especially visible now on gay dating sites and apps, including in Japan. Thomas Baudinette's (2017) insights into Japanese gay dating forums indicate that identities are formed around linguistic registers and labels like that discussed by Endo (2019) in her analysis of heterosexual singles searching for ideal partners. In both papers, the dating pools are primarily of people looking for serious romantic partners and future spouses, which is an important distinction from other dating scenes which are formed around more casual flings. Interestingly the men Baudinette observed using the 'Serious Forum', seemed to prefer less gendered pronouns (the more neutral *watashi* over masculine *boku* or *ore*), while also indicating a preference for traditionally masculine partners (*sawayaka or majime*) over ones viewed as effeminate or cute (*kawaii*) (2017: 249). Being *kawaii* was a less desirable trait for serious relationships and Baudinette's research shows that types embodying more masculine qualities were overwhelmingly popular.

Meanwhile, the popularity of the *rīman-kei* (businessman type) for gay men on this website seem at odds with the preference of some of the single heterosexual women who, while exaggerating their own gendered roles in house and home, are shifting away from the 'salaryman type'. For those women, a quiet, serious salaryman who does as he is told were often the exact opposite of their desired Other.

` One of the extracts Baudinette gives is of a *rīman-kei* man looking for a *majime-kei* partner who says the following:

> *Watashi wa tanoshikute, yasashii fun'iki no nonkeppoi rīman-kei desu* (I am a fun
> and straight-acting Businessman Type who has a kind aura (248).

To other gay men on this platform the use of *nonkeppoi* (*nonke* is slang for straight) to say that he 'acts straight' may be a desirable characteristic. It is further evidence that heteronormative identities are assumed not just by heterosexual individuals but by LGBTQ+ individuals, including in spaces which are explicitly queer. These ideal types seem to be familiar, a cultural reference point that can 'cross over' even to communities that occupy separate and marginalised social niches.[8]

One of the most common themes tied into precarity and uncertainty in modern Japan is that of disconnection. Disconnection comes with the territory of generational changes, of post-bubble economy Japan, and with the rise of the Internet and social networking services (commonly abbreviated as SNS). As social media increased in visibility and popularity between 1990 and 2000, educators and officials realised that the environment around sex education was changing drastically (Nishioka 2018: 179). Adolescents were being exposed to information about sexual acts, relationships, and sexual health earlier, without the mediating presence of parents or of schools. This new reality means that gender, sexuality, and sex are topics which are brought up outside of the control of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (often abbreviated as MEXT or called Monbusho).

Though, notably, the ubiquity of social media also offers support networks and safety nets for youth, especially members of LGBTQ+ communities. The grassroots organisations and individuals I have been speaking with about intimate topics like sexual consent all depend on online presences to reach audiences. And connect with people who have similar experiences, ideas, and identities.

Ayato, a masters' student in education at University of Tsukuba who identifies as gay, first experienced gay communities in Japan through using the online platform Twitter. This contrasted with physical spaces which have strict age requirements and social drinking. '…it's in my generation, I guess, around 20 years old. Like, people just prefer to just be online right? Not to, like, physically communicate in the street or somewhere… So, in that place [Twitter], I can just choose the person that I'm going to reach out to, and I don't have to go clubbing.' In his hometown on a small Japanese island, there was not a physical space where he could

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[8] The perspective I take on this paper and the entirety of my field research is that the conversation about harassment, consent, and sexuality education *should* include *everyone*. I acknowledge that this emerges from a white, middle-class upbringing in the United States and educational background in the United Kingdom. Yet, I have encountered groups and individuals in Japan who stress similar desires for diversity and inclusion—who include all genders, sexualities, and nationalities as part of their quest to gain 'mutual respect'. Their views and voices are yet to reach the majority, but have made admirable progress with local communities from 2015 to 2023.

meet people of other sexualities so it was online where he could learn about various topics, including sexual ones. And, importantly, Ayato began interacting with other gay and bisexual people from junior high school when, even if he had desired to, going to clubs or bars would not have been an option.

Rather than denying or resisting the important role digital spaces now play for Japanese youth in creating identity and cultivating community, grassroots organisations use SNS like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook to encourage discussions of gender, sexuality, and sexual consent. There is clear intention behind these organisational posts, which Toyomi also expressed: 'When I post, I am usually hoping to reach out to the students in my university. But at the same time, I'm also like, wishing to reach out to those who don't really know about gender issues.' For an active student team such as at ICU, posting frequently increases engagement and may fulfil the hopes of individuals like Toyomi who would ideally like everyone to have a chance to know more about gender issues.

For journalists who spurred on the #MeToo Movement in Japan in 2017 like Hachu and Ito Shiori, breaking their silence did start conversations about harassment especially in the fields of advertising, marketing, and news agencies. But whereas media coverage of such cases 'amplified women's voices and the movement in South Korea' the Japanese media did the exact opposite (Hasanuma and Shin 2019: 104). Reporters and commentators online engaged in bullying and outright defamation, criticizing victims' dress and behaviour. In Ito's case as well, other women have been a large part of the backlash, putting the burden of responsibility on Ito and women who have experienced similar harassment.

This disturbing narrative of women leading men on was further perpetuated because men are the gatekeepers in the [Japanese] media industry (ibid). Rebranding the movement as #WeToo or #WithYou has helped the movement's popularity somewhat, but even the initial outrage at scandals such as the Fukuda incident[9] or the incidents of sexism during the 2020 Tokyo Olympics[10] have difficulty progressing to legal change. And in Japan only about 17% of perpetrators are sentenced for rape (ibid: 106). Sexual harassment itself is also not considered a crime but more of a 'private matter.' This is reflected in Yahoo news comment forums (Tan and Liu 2022) and in widely read newspapers such as *The Mainichi* or *The Asahi Shinbun* (Zhang et al 2022).

Neutral or negative reactions to these incidents of harassment often root their arguments in threats to broader social structures, to disrupting peace and perhaps even

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[9] The Fukuda incident in 2018 refers to Junichi Fukuda of the Ministry of Finance resigning and having his retirement payments reduced after a female journalist went public about the sexual harassment she endured while assigned to cover the Ministry press club for TV Asahi. It resulted in a gathering of over 200 people outside the National Diet.

[10] In 2021, ex-Olympics chief Yoshiro Mori was forced to resign after making several sexist comments, implying that women talk too much 'if there are women present, the meeting will take a long time' (*josei ga hairu to kaigi ni jikan ga kakaru*). Creative director Hiroshi Sasaki also resigned after referring to well-known celebrity Naomi Watanabe as an 'Olympig'.

fabricating problems that are best ignored or tolerated. But independence and self-sufficiency rhetoric were and remain difficult to apply in many Japanese contexts.

Embracing uncertainty

If you mention 'gender issues' in Japan, including sexual harassment (*sekuhara*), you might be met with sympathetic sounds of agreement and anecdotes about unwanted groping on trains, bullying in school or work and the like. The responses are uncertain, muddled when it comes to who (or what) is to blame for the commonality of '*sekuhara*'.

Some men, both young and old, may complain about the need to keep both hands up in the train to avoid being accused of '*chikan*' and about the change in times where you can no longer make careless remarks about a female friend or colleague's physical appearance. They may victimise themselves with no prompting from their companions. It can swiftly turn into a light-hearted jab at someone's carelessness rather than a deeper consideration of an existing problem.

If you call out your co-worker's misplaced comment or tell your friend that changing their body language on the train to make it a safer environment for *everyone* is a small sacrifice, then a difficult conversation is initiated. This evokes limited but occasionally useful cultural categories such as *soto* and *uchi* (outside/inside) or *kokyuu* and *kojin* (public/private). Talking about sexual harassment, or even about sexual consent, always elicits *some* reaction. But to talk more deeply and freely, an individual must find the right place, the right community to have this conversation. They move from the outside (*soto*) to the inside (*uchi*). They work to find a group of people who views and questions the world the way they do.

Admitting this casual sexism is a problem is part of the issue. In separate conversations both Toyomi and Ayato raised similar points about lack of awareness—a point which organisations often attribute to insufficient education about gender and sexuality in schools. For Ayato, there were strong distinctions between the attitudes of his peers at his junior high school who he believed might make hurtful comments if he came out as LGBTQ+ and the welcoming spaces he found when he moved to Tokyo for university. These were not necessarily LGBTQ+ communities but spaces and people which made him feel that: *'Oh, I don't need to have, you know, Twitter or digital spaces. Because I have these physical spaces in which people can accept me as well.'* Toyomi earlier observed the exclusion of gay men from perceptions of masculinity among male university students, but also described the struggle with masculinity as one tinged with confusion and fear. He explained that such images of, for example, a masculine man who has sex with women, *'puts pressure on men and they feel uncomfortable, but they don't know why.'* Difficulty in understanding the reason, to Toyomi, meant that they defaulted to more toxic modes of behaviour which they didn't know how to fix. When these discussions continue, the communities which facilitate them cultivate the active sense of presence which Vizenor (2008) assigns to survivance. The concern and

uncertainty Japanese youth possess around 'gender issues' is a powerful foundation for moving beyond victimry, ignorance, and discrimination.

I focus here on two events I attended at Waseda University. Both events, hosted by the university's Gender and Sexuality Center, used in-person discussion groups as the main method for engagement. I view these events as examples of overcoming or embracing uncertainty through survivance. Students, faculty, and staff involved in such gatherings invoked narratives based in feeling 'othered', 'outed', 'ignored' or 'bullied'—which defined the context and purpose of the space.

One of the first Gender and Sexuality Center events I attended was a seminar about defining 'the closet' and what it means to 'come out' in Japan. These terms, commonly used in Western countries like the UK and the US, have been adapted as well for Japan-based LGBTQ+ communities. The guest speaker discussed how the perspective of most of the Japanese public was that same-sex love (*dōseiai*) is something which belonged inside the closet (*uchigawa*) and opposite-sex love (*iseiai)* as something which is already outside (*sotogawa*). The closet, to many Japanese people, represents 'a space where same-sex love should be hidden' (*dōseiai wa kakusu beki kūkan*). The mention of space in this and in other conversations about sexual minorities in Japan is especially important. Finding or carving out a new space represents a concrete method of survivance that LGBTQ+ Japanese youth may choose—if the option is explained as even existing for them.

Often the possibilities for minority groups, specifically LGBTQ+ individuals, are not introduced, much less described in detail. Only in the past decade have some forms of sexuality politics (*sei no seiji*) emerged in Japanese cities, often through public appeals for same-sex marriage rights. But, generally due to strong social reactions when LGBTQ individuals come out in Japan combined with expectations to keep such a personal preference to oneself and even still marry heterosexually, sexuality politics has not emerged in Japan the way it has in the US or the UK. The same applies to the 'post-closet discourse' put forth by Seidman (2002) suggesting LGBTQ+ people in Western countries have now integrated into mainstream society (Ueno 2022:3). Even in Western countries this 'post-closet discourse' ignores continued prejudices. LGBTQ+ people still need to strategise and be careful about which spaces and with which people they share their identities.

I agree with Ueno's discussion that this closet and post-closet discourse is further removed in Japan where both activism and sexuality politics are met with distrust and disdain. The knowledge gap about LGBTQ+ matters is also considerable, be it between the 'marginalised' and the 'majority', or between Japanese youth and their elders. At the 'coming out' discussion people described experiences of 'coming out' to their parents and siblings as opposed to their grandparents. Younger family members were significantly more likely to accept and begin to understand their children's narrative. Grandparents were not as flexible. Older generations might reject or dismiss the idea of sexuality and gender identity outside traditional gender ideologies. They would often cite the desire for grandchildren to adopt 'typical' or 'normal' (*futsū*) cis heteronormative family structures (i.e., a husband and wife

raising kids together, supporting aging parents when necessary). Japanese, Chinese, and Taiwanese students present all seemed to have similar experiences in this case of 'coming out' to family (if they had done so). There was resignation in their recollections, accepting that there was little to be done about these gaps in generational perspectives. These stories were not necessarily about celebrating difference but learning to live with it.

The idea of 'alternative lifestyles' was emphasised in a different event for students about being asexual or aromantic. Alternative lifestyles or relationships are often a private matter, attached to the idea of remaining single and rejecting marriage. Shared living space differs in these 'relations denying gender boundaries' and which 'concentrate on the internal features of relationships rather than their relation to the outside world' (Lunsing 2001: 176). The act of sharing personal experiences of realisation that one might be asexual or aromantic was defined by feelings of unease (*fuan*) or uncertainty (*moyamoya*). Not unusually for LGBTQ+ identities, difference or disconnection emerged from what was 'lacking.' In this case, participants expressed the absence of excitement or yearning for the romantic experiences often portrayed in media. One student said that she did not experience any *mune kyun* when watching or reading *renai* (romance) type media. When I asked what she meant by this, many others at the table pitched in with examples of scenarios where other people might feel *mune kyun*—the most memorable being *kabe don* or *yuka don*. Both involve one person pinning another against either a wall (*kabe*) or floor (*yuka*), apparently evoking the excited sensation of *mune kyun,* an anticipation of what would happen next in such a compromising situation. These types of scenarios went viral on social media, even reaching Western audiences in meme formats. But the members of the discussion group all seemed to agree that this type of romantic (or sexual) excitement was specific to Japanese contexts. In the USA or UK, *mune kyun* perhaps would not be expressed in the same way. Romantic or sexual tension was depicted more explicitly in the Western media students had encountered.

The final case I will present when drawing from these descriptions of community spaces is that of career and lifestyle choices as a way of embracing uncertainty and enacting survivance. Much of the journey for Japanese youth through their school years to their entry into the job market is 'predetermined'. For a young person who enters a four-year university programme, the third and fourth years are dedicated to *shūkatsu* (job hunting), as they search for companies which will provide a stable career, taking time off classes and extracurricular activities to do so. University offices provide career guidance in the form of resource pamphlets, language study support, and much more which are often focused on the pipeline from education to employment. At this Gender and Sexuality Center event staff explained that *kyaria* services could help students understand different lifestyles. This would include non-heteronormative lifestyles whereas typical career services might assume young people will eventually get married to someone of the opposite sex and have children. They are like the alternative lifestyles discussed by Wim Lunsing (2001) which often tackled the idea of what was a normal or 'common sense' (*jōshiki*) relationship (5).

Lunsing noticed in his interviews with many people who did not commit to *jijitsukon* (or 'common-law' marriage), that they creatively found satisfaction in single life or in life with a partner of the same sex (2001). The 'alternative lifestyle' options introduced by Gender and Sexuality Center staff included living alone in an apartment, in a share house with friends, or adopting a pet for companionship. In short, a lifestyle which did not require having a romantic or sexual partner. When we discussed whether we had thought about our future lifestyles, most of the members in my discussion group did not yet have a clear idea. The students present were mainly first and second years and the job-hunting process for Waseda students begins during the third year of university education.

Ueno looked at LGBTQ+ young adults' career plans in Japan versus previous studies of LGBTQ+ young adults in the US. The focus of his research was on how 'personal narratives align with social discourses' and there were distinct differences between the two groups (2022: 2). In contrast to the earlier study of LGBTQ+ adults in the US, Japanese participants showed a distinct preference for career stability over potentially LGBTQ+ friendly work climates. Individuals like Satoshi described a *komuin* (government employee) or *kaishain* (company employee) career as not just a stable but 'a normal job' 'illustrating that it is the default career choice for many Japanese people' (Ueno 2022: 9). This was the choice instead of a more flexible, possibly more accepting, work environment that would offer little chance for upward mobility.

The term *futsū* (normal) makes an appearance in these dialogues much as they did in Baudinette's study and as they did in discussions facilitated by Waseda's Gender and Sexuality Center. For the students I have spoken with as well as for Ueno's participants, their sexuality was 'a private matter' that they expected would need to be kept secret. Hiding their sexual identities at school or the workplace was a given for many, in stark contrast to the 'coming out' and 'gay pride' discourse in the UK or the USA. The primary reasons given were that revealing their sexuality could affect their ability to remain in full-time secure employment, to be promoted, and even impact the respect afforded to them by co-workers. For most, this desire for stability and financial independence outweighed the wish to reveal or leverage their LGBTQ+ sexuality as a resource.

Even in relatively informal and private settings, including in LGBTQ+ community spaces, I have observed that many young adults, students between 18 and 26, are hesitant to share narratives of 'coming out.' Many cite experiences of being bullied, ignored, or misunderstood by even close friends and family (Ueno 2022: 12). Being able to voice who you are and what you support is much less part of the discourse than in some other countries, notably North American and European countries. Only one Asian country, Taiwan, has recently legalised same-sex marriage in 2019, so we can speculate this is tied to the legal status of LGBTQ+ individuals in a nation.

Awareness (*ninshiki*) or social consciousness (*ishiki*) is often necessary to enact meaningful change at institutional and policy levels. But it is not a realistic platform for all youth identifying or allying with minority groups and speaking out against social issues. Previous

research on social movements and LGBTQ+ experiences in Japan and the early stages of my fieldwork demonstrate that uncertainty around gender issues can be more easily embraced by starting small with a shared identity (even shared secrecy). New relationships and connections can be formed on this common ground.

Conclusions

The struggle to define one's identity, especially in terms of gender and sexuality, is a constant for many people. For youth in Japan, current precarity in the form of unstable employment (Allison 2013), labour immobility (Ueno 2022), and the struggle for recognition, are exacerbated if they also feel pressure to 'come out' as a sexual minority. Rather than a 'loud and proud' narrative, I have observed and participated in 'quieter', more intimate gatherings of like-minded folks about issues of gender, nationality, sexuality, or all the above. Interestingly, the idea that topics involving sex and sexuality should be a 'private matter' pervades even these spaces which are created by and for the exact people who suffer most from structural inequality and violence. However, in these spaces, discussing private and intimate narratives becomes a choice rather than an obligation.

When it comes to issues related to gender inequality and lack of recognition and rights for sexual minorities, Japanese youth who educate themselves about these issues express clear unease (*fuan*) as well as feelings of haziness or uncertainty (*moyamoya*). Japanese youth who are knowledgeable and passionate about gender issues must work hard to get to that point. This barrier to awareness is especially salient if an individual is not part of the communities negatively affected by gender inequality or discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. These discussions often must be started and pushed onward by individuals belonging to minority groups like the LGBTQ+ community.

Community involvement and the creation of spaces for conversation has been a key survivance practice for interlocuters at my field site as well as a desired outcome for many individuals in other studies (Endo 2019; Ueno 2022; Takeyama 2016; Gagné 2016). This practice produces an active presence, the awareness that arises from similar experiences of the world, which brings many Japanese youth together (Vizenor 2008: 11). This is the case whether groups wish to publicly denounce scandals or prefer to privately commiserate over intimate embodied experiences.

These groups are often formed around the conversations and actions of a small, dedicated team of volunteers. A follow-up line of research is required to question how beneficial in-group discussion is for grassroots human rights and gender equality groups in the long-term. It is worth examining whether an intimate group of like-minded individuals hosting public forums or writing educational SNS posts only forms a type of echo chamber unable to connect with or relate to people with different perspectives.

But what is important here is the presence of connection despite panics (Cook 2019, Toivonen and Imoto 2012) and claims that human relationships are fading or fake in contemporary Japan. This paper demonstrates how one-dimensional those fears really are. Individuals will always strive for some form of connection to others. Japanese youth today are finding new reasons to connect, with uncertainty over gender issues being one of their motivations.

Intimacy is complicated and the types of affective landscapes (including cityscapes) (Takeyama 2016) that Japanese youth are navigating are diverse. The move from heteronormative relationships is especially significant, but so are elements of internationalism, as non-Japanese, and mixed-race Japanese live, work, and love in the same spaces. Queer intimacies and international marriages demonstrate how powerfully pervasive the patriarchal and heterosexual constructions of both home and workspaces are in Japan (Cook 2019). Strong, often negative social reactions that come from breaking with the conventions of heterosexual marriages demonstrate the myths and misunderstandings innate in Western views of Japan as a country which is historically LGBTQ+-friendly or LGBTQ+-tolerant. It is risky to base assumptions of current social issues entirely off historical precedents (Finlay 2022).

Even outside of romantic relationships and legal marriages, an intimate model linking people 'through emotional and affective ties rather than highly gendered structures of labour' seems preferred by youth (Alexy 2020:66, 2019). Though unlike in the 'connected independence' pattern Allison Alexy analyses, the discussions produced by youth about gender issues may not require explicit articulation of a feeling as much as spaces where articulation is an option.

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CHASING POSSIBLE FUTURES: REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

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This paper analyses uncertainty as a core component of entrepreneurship for refugees. Drawing from entrepreneurship literature and research on refugees' livelihoods, I challenge the conception of the rationality and solidity of entrepreneurship presenting how refugees become entrepreneurs in contexts of high uncertainty and adversity derived not only from their experience of displacement, but also the sudden COVID-19 pandemic. I present findings from a mixed-methods analysis of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Jordan and argue that refugee entrepreneurs show perseverance, resilience, and ability to succeed and grow their businesses. Their actions of necessity and opportunity entrepreneurship – as measured by the behavioural frameworks of causation, effectuation, and bricolage found in the business management literature - overlap in the context of an uncertain and adverse environment and constraining institutions that hinder typical entrepreneurial action. After describing the different levels of uncertainty faced by Syrian refugee entrepreneurs, I then present two ways through which they navigate uncertainty: by creating businesses as the only certainty in their lives, and by using previous or creating new social connections to respond to institutional constraints and adversity.

Keywords: refugees; constrained entrepreneurship; liminality; uncertainty; adversity

Introduction

This paper delves into the role of uncertainty in the lives of refugee entrepreneurs considered both in business creation and in business management. It draws from literature pertaining to refugee and business management studies to analyse the main sources of uncertainty and the ways through which refugee entrepreneurs respond to their state of perpetual liminality in

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managing their business by exercising survivance. Through a mixed methods study of Syrian refugees in Jordan, I conclude that uncertainty is the engine that fuels refugees' entrepreneurial agency and at the basis of their strategies of survivance. I follow the entrepreneurial behavioural frameworks found in the business management literature – the typical entrepreneurial framework of causation as well as the behavioural frameworks of effectuation and bricolage, each characterised by a higher level of uncertainty (Sarasvathy 2008; Baker and Nelson 2005) – and present evidence of refugees' mixed behaviour in managing their business in an uncertain context, with elements from each of the three existing frameworks rather than one common and predominant kind of behaviour. Refugees' mixed entrepreneurial behaviour and adoption of multiple strategies, including the creation of a network and retention of kinship ties with local communities, is necessary to exercise survivance, create certainty and exit a state of liminality. In this respect, I argue that unlike typical entrepreneurs, refugees have no control of the high amount of risk they endure and, on the contrary, thrive on the constraints and uncertainty posed by the institutional, historic, and social context where they operate.

Uncertainty is constant in refugees' lives. Unlike economic migrants, refugees migrate because of conflict or political persecution, with no clear views on when, or whether, they will be able to return. Yet, despite their situation of uncertainty and precarity, refugees manage to rebuild their lives in host countries showing a high level of resilience.

Analysis of refugees' livelihood strategies has shown that refugees have the potential to bring innovation; however, they are sometimes pushed to create a business – rather than willingly and freely deciding to do so - given the few job opportunities available for them (Jacobsen 2006; Betts et al. 2014). By doing so, refugees capitalise on their agency to address their vulnerability (Beninger 2022; Alkhaled and Sasaki 2022). However, refugees often encounter institutional limitations, socio-cultural barriers, or personal and structural discrimination that push them to informality, increasing their state of vulnerability, precarity, and uncertainty (de la Chaux and Haugh 2020; Fathallah 2020; Heilbrunn and Iannnone 2019). They often do not have time to choose their country of asylum, and find themselves in a new context where their previously acquired skills – including knowledge of the local language – are diminished. Their lives are precarious and more vulnerable than those of who has not been displaced, such as economic migrants or host country nationals, as refugees occupy distinct institutional contexts (Wauters and Lambrecht 2006; Omata 2021). In this respect, displacement has been conceptualised as a *process of coercive disruption* (Ali 2023), and refugees are some of the actors moving within it. Consequently, economic shocks hurt refugees' livelihoods more than nationals' with severe impacts on social cohesion – as shown by the COVID-19 pandemic (JDC, World Bank and UNHCR 2020; Hoseini and Dideh 2022).

The concept of survivance as depicted by Vizenor (2008) helps in describing the experiences of refugee entrepreneurs. Survivance is not intended just as a theory, but it is rather a state where marginalised individuals exercise not mere survival but also resistance. In this respect, by opening a business against all odds and under conditions of high uncertainty and precarity, refugees provide an example of survivance in that they affirm their presence as active individuals in the communities where they live, as contributors rather than competitors, as active development actors rather than passive humanitarian aid recipients.

Entrepreneurship as a specific economic activity for refugees has been studied in the early work of Portes and Jensen (1989), whose research in the Unites States found that refugees rely on their network of co-ethnics to open businesses and find a job quickly upon arrival in the host country. Research in other world regions has analysed the specificities of refugee entrepreneurs. Analysing the difference between refugee and migrant entrepreneurs in Belgium, Wauters and Lambrecht (2006) noticed the important role that uncertainty has in the lives of refugees through their sudden migration decisions, their precarious legal status, and the unknown duration of their permanence in the host country. For Jacobsen (2005), the study of refugees' economic activities, including entrepreneurship, must take into account their specific vulnerability, their strategies and assets, the impact of those strategies on the host society, and the institutional context that facilitates or hinders those strategies.

Indeed, the social and institutional context accounts for the variety of entrepreneurial outcomes for refugees. Refugees are not a homogeneous group (Betts, Omata and Bloom 2017): they are located in different institutional contexts and experience various economic outcomes, from entrepreneurial success to endless poverty. Refugees living outside refugee camps, for instance, enjoy better economic and social outcomes than those living in camps (Obi 2021). In Kenya and Bangladesh, where they face legal limitations to formal work, refugees employ their skills to open informal microbusinesses serving the communities around them within a complex pattern of economic interactions with other refugees and businesses from the host communities (Omata 2019; de la Chaux and Haugh 2020; Filipski, Rosenbach, Tiburcio et al. 2021). In European countries, where channels to find a formal job are more available, refugees use their skills to create social businesses that help them gain legitimacy and overcome liabilities, and use their cognitive skills to mobilise resources from both the home and host country (Harima and Freudenberg 2020; Harima 2022). In Turkey, where refugees are allowed to work with some movement restrictions and where high levels of discrimination exist, refugees create businesses out of perseverance, conditional on having the resources needed, affecting positively social integration (Shneikat and Alrawadieh 2019; Almohammad et al. 2021).

The presence of a substantial number of refugees engaged in entrepreneurial activities across five continents raises questions for researchers. Evidence on key aspects of refugee entrepreneurship, including its motivation, outcomes, enablers and constraints, is limited (Heilbrunn, Freiling and Harima 2019; Desai, Naudé and Stel 2021). In addition, the study of entrepreneurs in adverse environments and uncertain contexts is relatively new, and entrepreneurship research in developing countries, where most refugees are located, is scarce (Naudé 2010; Aliaga-Isla and Rialp 2013).

Risk-aversion is at the core of entrepreneurship. In order to be an entrepreneur, an individual has to exploit an entrepreneurial opportunity by taking a risk. As a result, studies on entrepreneurship have focused on variation of risk perception among entrepreneurs or the ways through which entrepreneurs minimise risks (Welter and Kim 2018). However, when risk-aversion is coupled with the high levels of uncertainty and adversity faced by refugees, the need to find new approaches to the study of refugee entrepreneurs arises. Such an approach, as pointed out by Desai, Naudé and Stel (2021), should be located at the intersection between the study of refugees, and the study of entrepreneurs. In this respect, I

will focus on literature on refugee studies and behavioural management frameworks pertaining to the study of entrepreneurs. Through this paper, I also acknowledge the multiplicity and diversity of refugee situations as I draw from a case study of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs living in cities in Jordan, an institutional context posing sectorial legal limitations for refugees to work and a mix of camp and city-based refugee permits.

As of December 2022, 660,892 Syrians living in Jordan were registered as refugees by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 80% residing in cities. The number is estimated to be higher by the Government of Jordan, making the total rise to at least 1.4 million in a population of just above 11 million people (Yahya, Kassir and El-Hariri 2018; MOPIC 2020). At the beginning of the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011, the Government of Jordan directed them to the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps. The strong kinship ties between southern Syrian and northern Jordanian tribes made it possible for many Syrians to avoid being located in camps and directly move to cities before applying for a residence permit (Turner 2015; Chatty 2017). The camp policy then shifted gradually and Syrians were able to move from camps to cities through a 'bailout' system when sponsored by a Jordanian national with family ties. While the implementation of the bailout system was quite relaxed at the beginning, de facto allowing Syrians to move out of the camps even without a Jordanian sponsor, its enforcement became tighter over time and led to forms of exploitation, to the point that some Syrians had to pay large amounts to their Jordanian sponsors (Turner 2015; Yahya, Kassir and El-Hariri 2018).

In this context, anecdotical evidence presents the existence of several kinds of businesses owned by Syrians in Jordan. Incentivised by the Jordan Compact and relaxed Rules of Origin for exporting to the EU, some Syrian entrepreneurs decided to relocate the medium or large businesses that they previously had in Syria to the Jordanian Special Economic Zones as the conflict broke out in 2011 (Speakman, Uhlmann and Borriello 2019). By 2017, around 800 industrial establishments were relocated from Syria to Jordan (Bayram 2018). By 2019, 1,661 Syrian-owned businesses were formally registered, in addition to 10,051 businesses with Syrian ownership of at least 50% (World Bank 2021a).

Although Syrians are allowed to work in Jordan in some sectors, the challenging regulatory environment de facto makes it difficult for them to obtain a valid permit or to find available infrastructure for maintaining or growing a business (Alkhaled 2019). Laws and regulations prevent Syrians – with or without refugee status - from easily formalizing their businesses: a significant amount of investment capital is required for gaining investor status, including evidence of legal residency, which many refugees do not have, and persisting requirements to partner with a Jordanian in business ownership are in place (Huang et al. 2018; Refai, Haloub and Lever 2018). As a result, despite data revealing the existence of some successful and big Syrian-owned companies, it is estimated that most Syrians in Jordan work or operate a business informally, in a country where the informal economy is equal to 18.8% of the GDP and estimated to employ 44% of the workforce (Asad et al. 2019; Fathallah 2020).

Against this background, this paper will approach one of the aspects characterizing the peculiarity of entrepreneurship for refugees: uncertainty. A brief review of the literature on uncertainty in entrepreneurship is presented in section 2. Section 3 outlines the methodology used for a case study of Syrian entrepreneurs in Jordan. Section 4 presents results of this study related to the internal and external factors generating uncertainty for Syrian

entrepreneurs and section 5 explains how Syrian entrepreneurs navigate this uncertainty. A conclusion sums up findings on the role of uncertainty in refugee entrepreneurship and delineates directions for future research in other contexts.

Refugee entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship under uncertain circumstances

Entrepreneurship research has largely been focused on the so-called 'expert entrepreneurs', assuming entrepreneurship as a linear path toward wealth creation (Shepherd 2020). Studies have not paid enough attention to non-traditional sub-sections of the population or to the interrelation between the entrepreneurial process and the spatial and temporal context where entrepreneurship takes place (Ruef and Lounsbury 2007; Welter 2011; Welter, Baker, Audretsch et al. 2017). Rarely, and mostly recently, attention has been brought to entrepreneurs who live under conditions of uncertainty and adversity, their entrepreneurial intentions, and the modalities through which they recognise and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities (Bizri 2017; Heilbrunn and Iannone 2019; Kwong et al. 2019). Following the work of Kloostermann and Rath (2001) on the mixed embeddedness of migrant entrepreneurs, importance has been given to the context for refugee entrepreneurship and the embeddedness of refugee entrepreneurs within the socio-institutional context of the host country, stressing the roles of uncertainty and ongoing changes in refugees' journeys (Harima, Periac, Murphy et al. 2021; Refai and McElwee 2023).

Uncertainty is a main component of entrepreneurship. While high levels of uncertainty have typically been associated with the decision to *not be* an entrepreneur, McMullen and Shepherd (2006) suggest that the role of uncertainty in entrepreneurship depends on two factors: the amount of uncertainty perceived by the entrepreneur, and their willingness to bear uncertainty. It comes naturally to think that, as refugees are individuals who experience high and often sustained levels of uncertainty, their willingness to bear uncertainty should be high. However, the behaviour of the entrepreneur under *persistent* uncertainty and adversity has not been fully analysed (Shepherd, Saade and Wincent 2020). Three existing frameworks have been used to study the way entrepreneurs manage uncertainty and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. While 'causation' is the typical entrepreneurial process resting on a logic of prediction where the entrepreneur predicts the uncertain future and gather all necessary means to exploit an entrepreneurial opportunity before firm creation, 'effectuation' rests on a logic of control in a situation of greater uncertainty, where the entrepreneur creates and manages their venture by continuously changing their actions as new contingencies occur, until one among the multiple possible effects is reached (Sarasvathy 2008; Welter and Kim 2018). 'Bricolage', on the other hand, has been studied in the existence of an even greater amount of uncertainty, typically occurring during a natural disaster or a crisis, and rests on a logic of 'making do' where the entrepreneur tackles resource constraints in penurious contexts, using constraints to their own advantage to create new opportunities gathering all available resources (Baker and Nelson 2005). The two frameworks considering a moderate to high level of uncertainty (effectuation and bricolage), however, have been studied in other

contexts than refugeehood, notably in the case of start-up and social entrepreneurship (Johannisson 2018), or in the aftermath of a natural disaster (Johannisson and Olaison 2007).

Kwong et al. (2019) notice this gap in the literature with their study of social bricolage (the use of bricolage for social entrepreneurship) among internally displaced populations, pointing out that displaced entrepreneurs have mixed predispositions to entrepreneurship and adopt multiple behaviours in creating and managing their business. Similarly, Nelson and Lima (2020) found out that the entrepreneur's behaviour during a natural disaster can switch to and from several processes as the phases of disaster relief change: from bricolage, to effectuation, to causation. Shepherd, Saade and Wincent (2020) also study the behaviour of refugee entrepreneurs within a context of persistent uncertainty and adversity, concluding that refugees' entrepreneurial actions generate increased social capacity for resilience without changing the underlying source of adversity.

The concept of 'liminal entrepreneuring' may help explain the role uncertainty can play in entrepreneurship. The concept is derived from the work of the anthropologist van Gennep (1960) and was related to entrepreneurship studies by Turner (1995), who used it to explain the organisation and creation of entrepreneurial practices of individuals living in precarious conditions. Liminality is seen as an in-between phase right after the individual's detachment from its previous state but before the reaching a new stage of becoming. It is a phase where infinite possibilities exist, and entrepreneurship is one of them (Garcia-Lorenzo, Donnelly, Sell-Trujillo et al. 2018). Liminality has been related to the uncertainty felt by refugees as an indeterminate in-between phase of their displacement where they are forced to reclaim existence to reconstruct a future (Alkhaled and Sasaki 2022). In order to choose entrepreneurship within this context, refugees have to disembed themselves from their home countries, undergo a cognitive process of creation before re-embedding themselves again in the host country (Harima 2022). When the institutional context within which refugees are embedded constrains entrepreneurial activity, refugees make use of their entrepreneurial agency – intended as ability, motivation, opportunity, process skills and institutional immunisation (McMullen, Brownell and Adams 2021) - to access more freedom and flexibility, even if it goes against the rules of formal entrepreneurship. This leads, however, to the emergence of 'subentrepreneurship', that is, 'different forms of self-employment that are undeclared to, or hidden from, relevant authorities, whereby superimposed institutions that constrain entrepreneurial activities are escaped to gain upward social mobility' (Refai and McElwee 2023, p. 1033).

Depending on the context, outcomes of liminal entrepreneuring such as subentrepreneurship can be connected to necessity entrepreneurship, which is the act of starting a business in response to challenges to enter the host country's labour market, or to opportunity entrepreneurship, whereby individuals start a business willingly in order to take advantage of an entrepreneurial opportunity (Chrysostome 2010). In this respect, recent research analysing refugee entrepreneurs has found diverse patterns where, on the one hand, refugee entrepreneurs open businesses for lack of other job opportunities and through the necessity to sustain their livelihoods (Refai, Haloub and Lever 2018; Shneikat and Alrawadieh 2019), or on the other hand, because of their business experience, entrepreneurial motivation and innovative behaviour (Bizri 2017; Obschonkaa, Hahn and Bajwab 2018; Mawson and

Kasem 2019). However, it is still not clear whether a common pattern exists for refugee entrepreneurs to open and manage their businesses in contexts of high uncertainty.

Methodology

This study draws on mixed-methods research to analyse the entrepreneurial intentions and behaviour of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Jordan. Given the lack of clarity in defining concepts like 'entrepreneur' or 'refugee entrepreneur' (Skran and Easton-Calabria 2020), this study adopts a relaxed definition. 'Syrian refugee' is defined as any person holding Syrian nationality who was forced to leave Syria following the events unfolding in 2011 and cannot safely go back, regardless of their UNHCR registration status. Hence, this term also refers to those Syrians who reside in Jordan with other kinds of visas, such as the investor status. 'Entrepreneur' is defined as any person working on their own, whether formally or informally, whether having employees or not, including those self-employed or home-based work. This relaxed definition of 'entrepreneur' is adopted because this study looks at the individuals' decision to open a business – here intended as any kind of private economic activity – and their ways of managing this business, regardless of its size or characteristics.

Research was conducted between January 2022 and January 2023, and consisted of three stages. First, focus group discussions and structured interviews were carried out with three Syrian entrepreneurs in Jordan and sixteen actors acquainted with them from the Jordanian public sector and the international development sector. This stage aimed at gaining a better understanding of the context where Syrian refugee entrepreneurs operate, including an understanding of the power structures and social rules existing among different actors relevant for refugee entrepreneurs. It also aimed at validating the quantitative instrument used in the second phase. Participants in this stage were chosen purposefully to reflect the plurality of views on refugee entrepreneurship and the existent power structures.

The second stage consisted in a quantitative survey questionnaire distributed to Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Jordan through personal contacts and social media advertisements. The questionnaire included 30 data points on Syrian entrepreneurs and their businesses, including descriptive data, perceptions on challenges for their entrepreneurship in Jordan, and close-ended and Likert scale questions (rating of sentences on a scale of 1 to 4) on the way their business was managed in the creation phase as well as in the current phase. This stage obtained responses from 290 Syrian entrepreneurs living in Jordan whose business was active at the time of data collection (June-August 2022).

Finally, semi-structured interviews were held in Arabic with six Syrian entrepreneurs who answered the survey questionnaire, chosen quasi-randomly to make sure the sample included variety in kinds of business, gender, sector, and location. This stage was added to examine in detail some aspects of the research questions, especially new arising themes linked to uncertainty.

Forms of uncertainty for Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Jordan

This study shows a general picture that is coherent with the overall data for Syrian refugees in Jordan presented earlier in this paper. Syrian refugees have mostly very small, informal businesses, with only a few owning larger and formal businesses, as depicted in table 1. Half of businesses are informal and, as also noted by Fathallah (2020), some are registered through the name of a Jordanian national, mostly because of difficult registration procedures or the impossibility of registering the business in a given sector. Generally, Syrian entrepreneurs are males and with low educational level, operating in food or garment manufacturing, with a small portion focusing on construction, carpentry, or maintenance. Among women, just three are registered: the rest work informally. 92% of women operate their business from their homes. Nine refugee entrepreneurs were interviewed, three in the first and six in the third stage, representing different kinds of businesses in the capital Amman and the neighbouring Zarqa. Table 2 briefly describes their businesses.

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE OF SYRIAN REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS IN JORDAN, BY BUSINESS SIZE

	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Self-employed (no employees)	113	38.97	38.97
Microbusiness (1-10 employees)	143	49.31	88.28
Of which: microbusinesses with 1-5 employees	111	38.28	
Of which: microbusinesses with 6-10 employees	32	11.03	
Small business (11 – 49 employees)	27	9.31	97.59
Medium business (50 to 99 employees)	3	1.03	98.62
Large business (100+ employees)	4	1.38	100.00
Total	290	100.00	

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEWED REFUGEE ENTREPRENEURS AND THEIR BUSINESSES

Participant	Gender	Business description	Year of establishment	Formality	Employees	Location
MS	Man	Detergents factory and trade company	2013	Formal	50+	Sahab (Amman)
MA	Man	Factory for production of construction material and one shop for retail	2013	Formal	15	South Amman
BA	Woman	IT software company	2014	Formal	25 to 30 employees and freelancers	West Amman
AY	Man	Factory for manufacturing of furniture and one showroom	2014	Formal	50+	North Amman
QM	Man	Home-based preparation of food products for restaurants	2020	Informal	15 freelancers, up to 25 during high season	South Amman

LS	Woman	Sale of small hand-made crafts and soaps	2014	Formal	5 full-time and 15 part-time	West Amman
YD	Man	Manufacturing and direct sale of hand-made furniture	2021	Informal	0	South Amman
SU	Woman	Home-based preparation and direct sale of food and beauty accessories	2014	Informal	0	West Amman
MJ	Woman	Home-based preparation and direct sale of food	2019	Informal	0	Zarqa

In spite of their generally low levels of education, refugee entrepreneurs have good knowledge of how to do business. Almost three-quarters of survey respondents had gained business experience in Syria before the conflict took place, and almost half used to own a business in Syria; however, their businesses in Syria were generally larger in size than the businesses they now own in Jordan. Among the Syrian entrepreneurs I interviewed, MS and MA used to own a similar business in Syria, which they relocated and expanded once the conflict started. AY, who now owns a large business, used to have a small shop selling clothes, and SU's husband (now unemployed) used to own several retail shops. Jordanian actors acquainted with Syrian refugee entrepreneurs perceive them as innate entrepreneurs, especially as traders and handcrafters, with propensity to run family businesses. Among the interviewed participants, almost all involve their family members in their business.

Despite the perception of Syrians' innate entrepreneurial spirit, most Syrians came to Jordan under especially turbulent circumstances that hinder entrepreneurship. Consistent with what is remarked by Wauters and Lambrecht (2006), almost all refugee entrepreneurs in our sample migrated to Jordan forcibly, and not willingly like other kinds of migrants. Refugee entrepreneurs' first encounter with uncertainty can be observed in their reason to migrate: 70% of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs chose Jordan because it was the closest country to Syria or because they had no other choice of where to seek refuge. The remainder moved because of the existence of a network of family or friends already living in Jordan (18%), and only a small number moved purposefully to open a business in Jordan.

Upon their arrival in Jordan, some were housed in refugee camps: MJ was living in the Azraq refugee camp with her three children, until a Jordanian national agreed to sponsor her right to move to the city. According to his current refugee status, YD is still supposed to live in the Zaatari refugee camp, where his parents also live: however, he overstretches his weekly permit to move from the camp to South Amman to be with his wife and children and run his business. Other Syrian refugee entrepreneurs live in cities because they have been granted investor status or because they have family members who are married to a Jordanian national and acted as a sponsor. Uncertainty deriving from sudden migration is felt by all kinds of refugee entrepreneurs, whether they succeeded in getting investor status and now run a large business, or stayed small and are self-employed:

> BA: We knew nothing about Jordan. I was in touch with a recruiting company, I wanted to find a job in Dubai, it was 2012. When I came [to Jordan], they gave me an offer to work as a software engineer in Dubai, but I refused because I had nothing, only 500 Dollars, I could not come back or go to Dubai, so I was stuck in Jordan. […] I established my company for many reasons. First of all, I was looking to support my family and there was no way to support them, make them work with me, and teach them what I know, other than opening a company. Now all the family works with me, even my mother, my husband, my brother and sisters.

> SU: We came to Jordan thinking we would spend two or three months before coming back to Syria. Other Syrians told us to start a life in Jordan, because the conflict would not end soon. We had just a small bag with some clothes for the kids. We rented a small studio, and we noticed that one Jordanian Dinar equals a lot of Syrian Liras but is worth nothing for living in Jordan. I started to learn how to make crochet as a business to gain some money.

Precarity and uncertainty are not only due to such sudden and unplanned migration. Refugee entrepreneurs also find constraints in the regulations posed by the host country, the language spoken, the relationship with the host communities, or the host country's business culture, which might be different from that of their country of origin. Some refugees might not want to be self-employed but face constraints to employment, and eventually decide to create a business as a last resort to gain some income. AB, a Syrian researcher, talks about refugees as 'migrants in transit' due to the high level of uncertainty and hardship that they face:

> The fact of moving out from your country, leaving a lot of things behind, it's very much risk-taking. [Migrant entrepreneurs] love their country. They come to a new country, they want to start over again, and they are able to take a risk. The life of refugees is more about the hearts. It's mostly about hardship. They are facing a lot of hardships through their daily lives. […] For me, refugees are migrants in transit. They are not necessarily like migrants because they are still facing so many challenges [such as] access to work permits, being able to open a bank account, understand the new markets or learn the language […]. All of those challenges are limiting them to become fully migrants. Until those challenges have been tackled, they are in a kind of transit.

This liminal phase experienced by Syrian refugees – in-between their previous life in Syria and the certainty of a new possible life in Jordan – is the result of their sudden and unexpected migration and their lives in a constrained institutional context. To overcome their liminality, refugees have to cope with the regulations imposed by the host country in order to meet their daily needs. In doing this, they exercise survivance and create their own place through entrepreneurship in a new uncertain and adverse situation.

Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Jordan are confronted with several challenges. These derive from factors external to them that cannot be changed through their agency, such as business regulations and the social and economic environment, or internal factors that can be changed through agency, such as their entrepreneurial identity and motivation to pursue their business, availability of capital and skills, or the network of business partners and supporters.

The major constraints for refugee entrepreneurs are linked to external factors, namely Jordanian regulations to open and manage a business. The sample rated these factors with a mean score of 3 or higher on a 4-point Likert scale (where 1 indicated 'not at all a constraint' and 4 indicates 'definitely a constraint'), with no significant difference among kinds of businesses or formality. Not knowing whether regulations will ever allow them to formalise their business is a major concern for refugee entrepreneurs, making their perception of their future in Jordan even more blurred. This is felt particularly by the smaller refugee entrepreneurs, notably those informally working from home, who cannot have certainty over their possibilities for sustainability and growth. MJ said: 'I heard a rumour that regulations will change and Syrians will be able to purchase assets. If it is the case, my dream is to buy a restaurant and open a formal business. If regulations stay the same, I will need to find a Jordanian partner to open my restaurant.'

Challenges also exist for refugee entrepreneurs who manage to formalise their business. LS reports that the biggest challenges for her and other Syrian refugee entrepreneurs are regulations and high taxation:

> When I started to look at how to register my business, here came the challenges and difficulties. Even if I had the capital, I needed a Jordanian partner and 50 thousand Dinars [approx. 70,500 US Dollars], which was a very big amount for me. If I had 100 thousand Dinars, I could open my own business. It is a crazy thing! […] The only sector where I can register a company alone as a Syrian is the service sector. For that reason, I had to register as a training company. […] [When I registered] everything changed. I had to pay for the government, taxes, etc. [The government] doesn't support small businesses. They deal with me as if I was a big company. I have 5 full-time employees, and 15 part-time who work from home, but I cannot register them formally because Syrians don't have permission to work in sewing, crochet or hand-made products. They can only work as pedicure, manicure and cleaning. […] Whether I work or not, I have to pay 1,000 Dinars for the accountant department and 500 Dinars for the budget, each year, even if I am a certified accountant. Even if I don't have the money. This is a big challenge for entrepreneurs in general, not just for Syrians. […] I also have to employ the lawyer to provide my papers, renew the commercial registration, the license, work permit, 2 or 3,000 Dinars per year, whether I work or not. It is very difficult for me. I am a small business and I cannot grow if I have to pay many things.

Another sudden form of uncertainty came from the COVID-19 pandemic. Jordan implemented a strict lockdown from mid-March to May 2020. In this period, businesses could not operate, with the exception of small neighbourhood minimarkets, pharmacies, and essential services, which could open only for a certain number of hours per week. After May 2020, a more relaxed form of curfew was put in place, with the opening of some sectors, which got again tightened in October 2020 and persisted until August 2021. It is estimated that between 20 and 38% of formally registered firms closed permanently or temporarily, the vast majority of which were small firms (World Bank 2021). Informal businesses – where most refugees work – received no support. The impact was felt most negatively on micro and home-based businesses, in great part owned by women, which could not deliver their

products due to lockdown and movement restrictions (Kebede et al. 2020; El-Abed and Shabaitah 2020).

> MJ: It is hard for me to talk about COVID-19. My business was completely frozen. It was not easy to find people who can lend money. Suddenly, someone started to leave grocery and some money at my door. Until now I don't know who it was, maybe some neighbour who knows I am alone with my kids and no income. It was very tough for me and my kids, like I was receiving charity. When the lockdown ended, I called my previous customers informing them that my business was re-opening, and it worked, thanks to God.

In this situation, 83.5% of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs who answered the survey indicated the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic was negative for their businesses. Talking about Syrians whose businesses were formally registered in the name of a Jordanian, one Jordanian participant reported that most Jordanians decided to close these businesses because of too much uncertainty and lack of money for renewing the social security registration: 'After the lockdown, small shops had to be registered to open. Those businesses usually are owned by Syrians, but carry a Jordanian name in the registration. In order to reopen your business, you needed to be registered and join the social security, which needs more money and is a legal responsibility on the Jordanian who just owns the businesses with his name. As a result, a lot of businesses closed down not to pay more money for the social security.'

Refugees' entrepreneurial agency in the face of adversity and uncertainty

Despite the many barriers and numerous sources of uncertainty in their future, refugee entrepreneurs show a continued resilience in facing adversity. Survey results show that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs demonstrate a strong willingness to pursue their businesses, showing a clear and rational use of their entrepreneurial agency. Combining causal and effectual behaviours (respectively, behaviours related to the causation and effectuation processes), the Syrian refugee entrepreneurs studied in this research set a goal in mind and follow their initial idea until their business looks how it was supposed to. They make sure to provide the same services they had originally conceptualised when they started their entrepreneurial journey, with a varying level of flexibility, as needed. As a result, Syrian refugees make use of mixed entrepreneurial predispositions linked to various behavioural frameworks to start and operate their ventures, mostly depending on the amount of capital available. When capital is available, they adopt sophisticated entrepreneurial behaviours that can be assimilated to the behavioural framework of causation, such as: strategizing, planning for production and marketing since the beginning of their business, analysing their specific market before creating their business, anticipating the resources needed to start. The story of MC, who used to be an entrepreneur in Syria and decided to relocate his factory to Jordan as the conflict started, illustrates how some Syrian refugee entrepreneurs respond to uncertainty by using the capital they managed to save from the conflict:

> [When the war broke out] I decided to find something outside of Syria. I visited Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan, to decide if I could do business in these countries. I made an evaluation of all these countries and I found that Jordan is more confident for my product. So I decided to go to Jordan. In January 2013, I went to Jordan and in three months I bought a ground area, with two buildings, to build my factory. […] I went to Jordan with my brother, my sister, my whole family came here to Jordan. I saw that the culture is very close, and also the distance between Amman and Damascus is not so far, so it is easy to come back to Syria and make visits between Syria and Jordan. […] our export market is close to Jordan, I export to Iraq and Saudi Arabia, it's easier.

When capital is not available – as in most cases – I have found that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs still tend to use common entrepreneurial strategies assimilated to the behavioural framework of causation in creating and managing their businesses. AY, who now has an investor status and owns a large furniture company ready to export, saved the little money he had brought with him from Syria by renting a very small apartment for him, his two wives, and seven children:

> With the conflict, my business [in Syria] crashed. I asked a friend from Libya to lend me 850 US Dollars. That is what I had when I came to Jordan, with no income, no job, no skills. Comparing Jordan to Syria, and looking at the numbers of Syrians who were moving to Jordan, I saw the opportunity for doing business. I rented a basement for my family and split it into two rooms. I was using one room as my workshop, and started working with wood to make bedroom furniture. The market value of the furniture was 900 Jordanian Dinars, but I sold it for 700. A lady came to see it, and she asked me to lower the price to 600, which I refused. She came back with her nephew, who was a carpenter, he checked the furniture. He said he came thinking I was a thief, but changed his mind once he saw my work. I told him: 'I have rent to pay, which is almost 300 Dinars. 350 for me as a worker, and other expenses for 500-600, for a total of 1,200 Dinars per month. I produce two furniture sets per month in these circumstances. The capital to build one is 600 Dinars even before starting working, because I am spending 1,200. So, at the end of the month, what I produce, is already spent, and not enough.' When I had 8 workers, I was producing 5 sets a day, selling each for 700 Dinars. I still used to gain 150 Dinars per set. [Back then] I made a quick market analysis and noticed that furniture comes mostly from Turkey and Malaysia. I set myself the long-term goal [to enter the furniture industry]. […] Everything I did until now, it was decided in that basement. If your aim is small, you will stay small.

When interviewing Syrian refugee entrepreneurs, I have witnessed their high level of rationality, perseverance, and strong ability to achieve their aims even under difficult circumstances. Despite the high levels of uncertainty, I have found that they use a mix of causal behaviour – the typical entrepreneurial behaviour found in the literature – and effectual behaviour – the entrepreneurial behaviour focused on a higher level of uncertainty - in managing their business under uncertain circumstances. While basing their business strategy

on the resources, capability, and knowledge available, typical of effectuators, they still implement control processes to be prepared to possible future adversity, research their target markets, and strategise, all traits connected to causal behaviour. Depending on the resources they have, including the network of people they know, Syrian refugee entrepreneurs' actions seem to be composed of some causative elements (e.g. acquiring the necessary resources before the start of their business, implementing control processes, having a clear vision for their future) as well as effectual elements (e.g. trying a number of different approaches, being flexible, adapting to sudden changes and available resources).

In addition to this, when resources are very constrained, sampled Syrian refugee entrepreneurs are found to adopt elements from the behavioural framework of bricolage, such as experimenting, running several projects at once or using discarded materials, until their business succeeds. SU decided to start a business from the moment she, her husband, and three children arrived in Jordan. With the help of a Syrian friend, she learned how to produce crochet on YouTube. Then, she decided to learn how to make necklaces and started a Facebook page to sell them. Now, she keeps running her accessories business, while she has also opened another Facebook page for selling home-made food she makes in her old oven at home: 'If I had a new oven and a big freezer, I could expand my business and increase productivity. I could buy fresh vegetables at cheaper price during the season and freeze them. Sometimes I have to decline big orders because my oven is old and I don't have a big refrigerator.' While SU could be the embodiment of the bricoleur, she continuously makes sure she gains enough revenue to buy new raw material for her businesses, showing elements of causation in ensuring she has control over her business to eventually expand it:

> For each order, I calculate the cost, including transportation and gas for cooking, and my revenues. With each order, I see if it is working or not, and then adjust in the next order. […] In Syria, when you open a business, for one year you don't touch any revenue unless it is for investing. Here it is different. The kids take from the revenues, you are spending the capital, and at the end of the year you have no money to pay and have to close. This is why so many businesses failed in Jordan.

Other interviewed Syrian refugee entrepreneurs work along similar lines. MJ, AY and YD also learned the basic skills for producing their crafts from YouTube. At the same time, they make sure their business grows by committing to it, paying attention to their returns, and investing them in producing more.

By analysing Syrian refugees' use of mixed entrepreneurial behaviours, this research has found that refugee entrepreneurs make specific use of two interrelated mechanisms to navigate uncertainty and exit liminality through survivance: they use uncertainty to their advantage to re-invent their selves, and use networks of other refugees and local Jordanians to mitigate the parts of uncertainty they cannot control. In this, they exercise survivance by affirming their new selves in the Jordanian context, trying to overcome the existing constraints to their self-reliance and independence. As pointed out by Refai and McElwee (2023), refugee entrepreneurs move in a 'Liquid Cage of Rationality' – a paraphrase of Max Weber's 'Iron Cage of Rationality' (Weber 2013[1922]) with reference to the constrained institutional

contexts where refugees operate, also accounting for the 'liquidity' and steady movement of change demanded by the cultivation of contingencies in entrepreneurship. In this 'Liquid Cage of Rationality', refugee entrepreneurs are embedded in multiple layers and interact with several contexts, including a constrained institutional context that hinders formality and creates a vacuum of possible uncertain futures.

Through this research I have noticed that the perseverance with which refugee entrepreneurs navigate uncertainty within a constrained institutional context derives from uncertainty itself. The entrepreneurial motivation of most refugees is rooted in necessity in an environment where uncertainty is omnipresent; however, at the same time, their business becomes the only certain point in a galaxy of uncertain outcomes. Syrian refugee entrepreneurs derive strength from their perception of uncertainty to reflect on their liminal state and create certainty. In this sense, uncertainty represents the fuel of refugees' entrepreneurial agency and makes them more sensitive than others to the discovery of entrepreneurial opportunities:

> AY: Three things form an entrepreneur: your idea, history, and ability; your skills; and your knowledge. Those factors were mixed with the circumstances of the conflict in Syria, that pushed us to be creative, forced us to reconsider our existence, to wonder 'What am I doing here? Why am I here?' It is good what happened in Syria: otherwise, all these good things [businesses created by Syrians] wouldn't have happened. If these people had stayed in Syria, nothing would have changed.

After the adversities of the war, Syrian refugees also witnessed the adversity of the COVID-19 pandemic. 19% of the surveyed Syrian refugee entrepreneurs had founded their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic, and another 25% right after the lockdown was lifted. YD is one example: forced to stay at home jobless because of the lockdown measures, he started to learn how to make hand-made furniture with some wood and foam he managed to buy, using some skills he learned in Syria when working as a trainee in a similar business. When asked why he decided to start his business right during the COVID-19 pandemic, he replied:

> I was working as an electrician on a daily basis, but during COVID-19 everything was down. I did research on the internet, watched some videos from home and I trained myself in making couches for six months, before deciding to open this workshop two months ago. […] My work is not the usual couches you find in the market, it is something new. I also offer the opportunity to customise the furniture, at your own taste. My customers are mostly foreigners, Americans or Europeans.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have rendered Syrian refugee entrepreneurs more audacious and risk-takers in their businesses, emphasising their bricoleur behaviours by trying to exit their perennial liminal stage with the resources they had. Forced to stay at home, having lost their jobs, many found themselves wondering a second time about their future. Interviewed participants from the Jordanian public sector witnessed the same:

Syrians working in factories with a fixed job benefitted from the curfew and lockdown because they had more time to start their own businesses. They started to learn new skills, how to produce new kinds of food, textiles, etc. Some of them started to give private classes. Home-based businesses grew among Syrians as a reflection of lockdown measures.

The story of QM shows a similar pattern. After the COVID-19 pandemic, he was badly injured at work and had to stay at home without work, unable to move. Leveraging on the knowledge gained in his previous job as a chef and his knowledge of the food sector, he came up with the idea of preparing peeled garlic bags and fresh lemon juice to sell to restaurants in Jordan. Once feeling better, he personally visited several restaurants to propose his products. His informal business quickly took off and he now informally employs about 15 families as seasonal, freelance workers.

With their business being the only certain thing left, the interviewed Syrian refugee entrepreneurs try to have a hand on uncertainty. To mitigate uncertainty, they take rational choices in the management of their businesses, for their lives and those of their families depend on it. Rather than catching any opportunity available, they choose a certain direction and follow it despite the uncertain circumstances. An example is YD, who was offered the opportunity to move his business to Canada and apply for Canadian citizenship:

The last option for me is to leave an Arab country and go to a foreign [non-Arab] country. If tomorrow I receive the approval to go to Canada, I would do it, for my kids. But if I get the approval once I have my documents here in Jordan, and I can formalise my business, I would stay here.

But these practices are not enough to face uncertainty, especially when operating in a 'Liquid Cage of Rationality'. Without enough capital to become investors, I have found that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs make use of their networks to further navigate uncertainty and adversity. Social networks are particularly important in Jordan, where a tribal system is in place. As reported by Fathallah (2020), Syrians in Jordan find social capital in the form of bonding with other Syrians for immediate support or bridging with Jordanians for longer-term survival, for instance by creating a supply chain with Jordanians or relying on tribes for protection from exploitative landowners. For interviewed Syrian refugee entrepreneurs, kinship ties and common cultural and religious affiliations are important for the certainty they represent in a turbulent context:

MC: Us Syrians, when we came to Jordan, it was not only to open businesses. It's also for our families to be together. I need that the culture which surrounds me and my family is very close and easy to navigate. For us, we found that for our family it would be easy to live in Jordan, unlike in Turkey, where there is a different language, and unlike in Egypt, with the different habits. For my family it is not easy to make new relationships. My family has big relationships with many people here in Jordan, they know a lot of people, it's easy because of the culture and the behaviour and the habits are close, not so far like in Turkey.

Results from the survey report that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs do not feel discriminated against by Jordanians in their business dealings: factors linked to discrimination were constantly rated very low on a 4-point Likert scale. Interviews with Jordanians have revealed their perception that Syrians brought a new way to do business in Jordan, sometimes positively welcomed by the local population. This new way of doing business is especially brought by the self-employed, as testified by a Jordanian municipal employee:

> […] this new perspective of investing in preparing food, making new dishes, also helped Jordanians who created businesses. This […] was working well especially during the lockdown and curfew during COVID-19, when people had to work from their houses. Syrian women were working with Jordanians and taught them how to work from home. This helped to raise up the economic capacity of families. At the same time, Syrians introduced us to new products, especially new sweets, that we didn't know about. Syrians provided new inputs also in house decorations, like gypsum boards, and food delivery, online marketing. Syrians showed Jordanians how to use the scooter to deliver food, instead of cars.

In running their small ventures, interviewed Syrian refugee entrepreneurs capitalise on their social networks to build their resilience and overcome constraints. Since Jordanian regulations target all Syrians, and not just those with refugee status, networks are used by any kind of business, whether formal or not, big or small. MA managed to fulfil the requirement of partnering with a Jordanian national for creating his business and gaining investor status by partnering with the husband of his sister, a Jordanian national who used to live in Syria before the conflict broke out. MJ, who is self-employed in an informal home-based food business, made an agreement with the Jordanian husband of one of her friends from Syria, who is a Talabat (a mobile app for food delivery) driver to deliver food to her customers. As a result, her orders increased. The embeddedness of Syrian refugees in the local society through family ties, coupled with a mutual understanding of the same cultural and religious practices, also makes informal Syrian refugee entrepreneurs feel protected. MJ says she is not afraid to be reported to the authorities, as she feels protected in her small neighbourhood as a widow with three children. YD was once caught by the police while delivering a couch produced in his informal workshop: aware of the situation in which Syrians live, the police officer let him go showing his sympathy.

Syrian refugee entrepreneurs are also found to create new networks to navigate uncertainty, helped by the fact that they do not feel discriminated against by Jordanians. They often link up with local Jordanians who support and advise them in their business:

> YD: I registered the business through a Jordanian friend, on papers this is his business, but I do all the work. It is a friendly agreement. My friend is a taxi driver, I don't pay him a fee, but I use him to deliver the products to my customers, so he is also gaining a bit from the business. […] I have three friends, two Jordanians and one Syrian, who believe in me. They helped me a lot in creating my Facebook page, marketing, and supported me emotionally. […] To be honest, besides the problems in the registration, all Jordanians living nearby my shop help me, I can buy meals in local restaurants and pay them when I have money. The Jordanian

community gives me huge support. One of them is willing to sponsor me to be able to formally live in Amman and never go back to the camp.

Some interviewed Syrian refugee entrepreneurs create networks purposefully for sustaining their business. To grow production and increase productivity, QM created a network of other refugees, migrants, and poor Jordanian families to help him in his informal business of preparation of food products for restaurants:

> QM: I buy the raw material, sometimes I go to the Jordan Valley or in the South to get a good price from the farm. I have an agreement with fifteen families, I pay them according to their productivity. In most families, the women who stay home work, also the husband joins them once he comes back from work, to help increase the productivity. The more you work, the more you get paid. I didn't set a fixed salary, otherwise I have to pay more if they work less, and if they work more, it is not fair for them. When a family is done, they call me, we weight the food, and I pay them cash for how much they produced. I come back home, I check the products with my brother and my wife, and we pack them making them ready for delivery to hotels or restaurants. […] we started from our neighbours; I knew they needed some income. Then more people from the neighbourhood wanted to join: Egyptians, Syrians, Jordanians, Palestinians, Yemenis. When the season is good, I employ up to 25 families, also from outside of Amman.

A similar strategy is adopted by LS, who informally employs other refugee women who work in a home-based business. Finding ways to grow their businesses, refugee entrepreneurs find a social aim in creating networks of other individuals living in similarly precarious circumstances, to collectively mitigate uncertainty.

Conclusions

Mechanisms for entrepreneurship, resilience, and resource creation in the context of aggravated adversity and persistent uncertainty are still unclear (Shepherd 2020). These questions point at the need to study 'common entrepreneurs' as opposed to the 'superentrepreneur' typically found in literature. Refugee entrepreneurs are some of the common entrepreneurs emerging from adverse circumstances. Their journey is shaped by uncertainty and precarity because of the sudden context of their move to another country and the impossibility to go back safely, making them live in precarious and liminal conditions that influence their ventures. To paraphrase Shepherd (2020), refugees can be seen as ordinary people who step up and do extraordinary things. However, how they navigate persistent uncertainty using their entrepreneurial agency is still unclear.

In this paper, I have used the case study of Syrian refugee entrepreneurs in Jordan to provide a description of the role of uncertainty in refugee entrepreneurs' lives and a view of some mechanisms they use to navigate this uncertainty and exit their state of liminality. I have found three main sources of uncertainty for Syrian refugee entrepreneurs: their sudden and unprepared move to another country and related lack of capital, assets, and knowledge; the

presence of constraining institutions that limit their entrepreneurial action; and other forms of sudden contextual and environmental uncertainty, which fall equally on both the refugees and other residents, such as, in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, Syrian refugees create a business mostly out of necessity. However, while necessity entrepreneurship has been considered to yield low-productivity businesses, this research has shown that some refugees might be able to succeed and grow their ventures, eventually overcoming their liminal stage, once they manage to gather the necessary financial resources. In addition, although necessity entrepreneurship in disaster-like situations and resource-scarce contexts is typically connected to bricolage as the main entrepreneurial behaviour used, I have found that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs adopt different behaviours to challenge their liminal state, including behavioural traits connected to effectuation and causation, such as planning, strategizing, and showing flexibility to changes while keeping their one single entrepreneurial aim.

Analysing the example of Syrian refugees in Jordan, I have identified two main mechanisms through which refugee entrepreneurs navigate uncertainty.

First, when it comes to refugees, entrepreneurship and uncertainty are related and interlinked. Uncertainty is a driving force for refugees to decide to go into self-employment and bet on themselves, as they are the only thing that remains. This way, and with much perseverance, refugee entrepreneurs use their entrepreneurial agency to turn uncertainty to their own advantage as they develop entrepreneurial identities as their only option to survive. Rather than passively waiting for an opportunity to come, I have found that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs exercise their survivance by setting a clear goal in mind and trying to make it work, resorting to a mixed entrepreneurial behaviour made up of elements from causation, effectuation, and bricolage processes. It is their perception of uncertainty and their prolonged state of liminality that creates entrepreneurial identity and forces refugees to think within the typical entrepreneurial parameters of causation, even though some elements of effectuation and bricolage persist when the institutional context does not allow for growth or until the refugee entrepreneur manages to gather the necessary resources to turn their business into what they originally planned. In a context of high uncertainty and precarity, refugees also make use of new practices in creating their business, adjacent to the behavioural framework of bricolage, yet while keeping the same business idea and enacting clear strategies, even though these cannot be implemented in the traditional entrepreneurial sense given the constraints posed by the institutional environment where they operate.

Second, I have found that Syrian refugee entrepreneurs use networks and kinship ties with other refugees or local Jordanians. These networks help them overcome several layers of uncertainty, from the constrained institutional environment, to the lack of financial or material resources to start their business. In a country like Jordan, where kinship ties are of utmost importance for carrying out everyday tasks, Syrian refugees find themselves in a position of privilege when previous kinship ties with Jordanians exist. When it is not the case, they manage to integrate into the social fabric of the host society by leveraging on the sympathy felt by Jordanians, who are close to them in culture and religion, and to create new networks with others who feel similar levels of uncertainty in their lives – refugees, poor Jordanians, migrants.

The opportunity structure is a central pillar for understanding the way refugees create, see and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities. However, it also represents a complex interplay of different features, and the way individuals act within it – namely, their entrepreneurial behaviour – is determined both exogenously by the context and endogenously by the individual characteristics (Kitching and Rouse 2020). However, we do not know much of the opportunity structure and entrepreneurial behaviour of refugees, as they are characterised by a higher level of uncertainty than the typically analysed entrepreneurs (Kwong et al. 2019).

In this paper, I have tried to advance an understanding of the sources of uncertainty for refugee entrepreneurs and the strategies they put in place to navigate such uncertainty. However, given the complexity of the opportunity structure for refugees, crucial questions remain unanswered. Namely, apart from isolated studies (Wauters and Lambrecht 2006; Alexandre, Salloum and Alalam 2019), we do not know what differentiates a refugee who decides not to become an entrepreneur from one who decides to do so, and whether uncertainty plays the same role for different refugee entrepreneurs living in different social and institutional contexts. For the time being, we can postulate that several interconnected factors account for the way refugee entrepreneurs navigate uncertainty: their identity and cultural background, which includes proximity to the host country's social, cultural, and religious context; the capital they manage to save; the skills acquired before and during displacement; the network of host community members and other refugees or migrants they have in the host country; and the institutional context that regulates their possibility to become entrepreneurs.

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TURNING UNCERTAINTY INTO RISK: CULTURAL HERITAGE AND WESTERN SUBJECTIVITY MODELS AMONG UNSUCCESSFUL RETURN MIGRANTS OF THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE (VELINGARA, SENEGAL)

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This article develops the concepts of uncertainty and risk (Calkins 2016) in the context of a particular phenomenon of human mobility: unsuccessful return migrations from the Central Mediterranean route in Sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, the article is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Velingara (Senegal). Among the Fulɓe Fulakunda, empty-handed homecomings are a moment of crisis where people have to rethink their life trajectories. Return migrants interpret the journey and return through historically local concepts such as shame, honour and independence, questioning their meaning to escape social stigma and to value their experience. In this context, the International Migration Organisation (IOM) programme of assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) comes into play. IOM's programme aims to educate migrants into businessmen capable of reading their current situation and planning their future in terms of managing risks and local economic competition. This article shows how the moments of uncertainty created by the economic and social marginalisation experienced by return migrants and their social networks become a contested field where aid programmes appear as forms of governmentality to tackle 'irregular migration' by producing new neoliberal subjectivities.

Keywords: return migration, Central Mediterranean route, risk, Fulɓe, Fulakunda, AVRR

Introduction

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This article aims to investigate the concepts of 'uncertainty' and 'survivance' in the field of unsuccessful return migration studies, focusing on the discourses revolving around unsuccessful returns from the African Central Mediterranean route in Velingara (Senegal), among the Fulɓe Fulakunda. Coming back without having achieved what one wanted and, indeed, having lost much of one's own and one's family's capital is a moment of profound uncertainty: it means dealing with the physical and psychological consequences of having survived displacement and violence, as well as having to imagine a different future in the difficult context of the contemporary Senegalese 'society of getting by'.[2]

Canut and Mazauric have already analysed how unsuccessful return migrants draw on a vast collective discursive repertoire which goes beyond their personal experience in order to cope with this moment of profound uncertainty (Canut and Mazauric 2014: 261). They draw their narrative material from a variety of sources, consisting of books, policies, films, humanitarian discourses and traditional histories with the aim of countering narratives that see them as losers, marginal, lacking courage, and not determined enough. Taking control over the narrative of their own experience is a fundamental step for reasserting one's presence against the marginalisation created by the failure of their migratory enterprise (Vizenor 2008). Return migrants' narratives are 'a way of engaging with the world that enables one to refine what is known and generates new forms of knowledge' in order to try to make sense of uncertainty (Calkins 2016: 3).

For convenience of exposition, the narrative material available to migrants will be divided into three layers: one relating to historical rooted cultural concepts; one which comes from the reconceptualisation of the *laawol ley* (backway)[3] as a 'school of life'; and the discourses advocated by international aid organisations and programmes, such as the International Migration Organisation's (IOM) Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) programme.

In introducing AVRR programmes, I consider them as biopolitical tools of 'externalisation of the borders between the Global North and the South' (Stock et al. 2019), aiming at re-shaping the desires of the subject. Following Beck's intuition of 'risk as a governmental technology' (Beck 1986), the analysis will show how IOM's discourses aim at filling return migrant's uncertainty with pre-packaged socio-economic recipes. In doing so, as Calkins writes in discussing Mary Douglas' thought, they locate risk in the realm of individual responsibility, holding 'individuals accountable for their actions and for moving beyond the limits of acceptable risk' (Calkins 2016: 75). However, the extent to which the risk can be

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[2] The 'culture of getting by' (*culture de la débrouille* in French or *Goorgóorlu* in Wolof) is a definition given by Moumar Coumba Diop to describe the way people live through 'the failure of the development ambitions of the postcolonial state' (Diop 2008: 364). For young people, 'getting by' meant being ready to do anything to survive, finding a place in the informal sector, begging or stealing, switching to forms of open or clandestine prostitution and also 'to leave at all costs' (Diop 2008: 363-364; Degli Uberti and Riccio 2017). The culture of getting by is characterised by a 'survival logic' (Diop 2008: 19) which has fuelled international mobilities: *Tukki ngir Tekki* (travel to succeed) is the Wolof expression which indicates 'going abroad' as an opportunity for opening new horizons and opportunities for individuals and their household (Bredeloup 2018: 99).

[3] *Laawol ley*, which can be translated as 'the route that passes from below', is the local word to indicate the land migratory journey made without legal permissions or papers either by foot or land vehicles. The term 'backway', instead, is mainly used in the Gambia to indicate irregular routes to Europe (Gaibazzi 2018: 245)

considered acceptable by the travellers of the *laawol ley* can only be understood by considering the economic and social conditions under which they live.

Contextualising return migration in Velingara

Velingara is a Senegalese border town created at the beginning of the colonial era, when the kingdom of Fuladu was divided among Gambia (England), Senegal and Guinea Conakry (France), and Guinea-Bissau (Portugal). The majority of the population belongs to the ethnic group of Fulɓe Fulakunda (Fanchette 2011: 21), a part of the vast Fulɓe archipelago (Boutrais 1994: 137). The Fulɓe Fulakunda entered the circuits of international migration later than other Senegalese populations, at the end of the 1970s, when France was already curbing down the possibilities of entering the metropolitan French territory from its former colonies. This historical delay shapes experiences of international mobility nowadays, forcing many young people to go through the Central Mediterranean route, and joining this overland journey starting from Dakar or Tambacounda and heading up to the Libyan coasts, passing through Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and the Sahara Desert.

Sub-Saharan human mobility was deeply influenced by the armed conflict which ended Mu'ammar Qhadafi's regime in Libya in 2011 (UN 2018: 10), as well as by the European La Valletta Action Plan (VAP) in 2015, which marked a new phase of addressing root causes of irregular migration and displacement in Africa. The process of externalisation of European borders has involved several international organisations and NGOs, which acted as key actors in the diffusion of EU migration policies (Lavenex 2015). An example of these programmes was IOM's Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration (AVRR) through which 118,360 nationals of West and Central African countries were repatriated from 2017 to June 2021 (IOM 2021). Several reasons pushed the Fulɓe Fulakunda in Velingara to join this massive movement towards Libya: local economic dynamics, the development of road infrastructure and means of transport, communication technologies, and urban working opportunities which have strictly linked internal Senegalese mobility to international routes. Furthermore, long-distance mobility was also shaped by the reduction of income opportunities in other West African countries, such as the Ivory Coast and Nigeria, the tragic loss of hundreds of lives of young Senegalese in trying to reach the Canary Islands by pirogues in 2005-2006 (Carling and Carretero-Hernández 2008), and the misadventures told by travellers who had attempted the Western Mediterranean route, which passes through Mauritania and Morocco.

At the time of my fieldwork, a bus left from Velingara to Bamako every Sunday. There, travellers could easily find a connection to Niamey, where the crossing of the Sahara Desert can be quickly arranged. Nevertheless, the chaotic political situation in Libya, human trafficking networks, and more and more restrictive laws by European countries has made a positive outcome of the journey more and more unlikely. This resulted in a significant growth of unsuccessful returns after 2015. Empty-handed return became a life-changing event for entire family networks, which have to deal with the disillusionment of 'the possibility of a (desired) alternative to a (currently lived) reality' (Kleist and Thorsen 2017: 2). These unfortunate adventurers – as travellers of the *laawol ley* love to depict themselves – often come back after

having lost family wealth, land, cows, and money they (or someone else) borrowed to finance their journey and to deal with the difficulties they encountered. Once they are back, they have to face the shame of having anchored their family even more firmly into a condition of poverty, as well as the shame of a constant comparison with those who made it and are now living abroad. Despite being physically absent, the 'migrants who made it' are constantly present through the houses they build, their regular round trips from Europe, and the remittances they send through money transfer services such as MoneyGram or Western Union. In rural Senegal, remittances have become fundamental to assert one's social position, and they have also contributed to the corrosion of local residents' purchasing power and the rising prices of land, houses and maidens' dowries.

Methodology

This article relies on ethnographic observations as well as individual and group interviews run between October 2019 and October 2021 in the province of Velingara (Senegal). The average profile of return travellers is that of men between the ages of 18 and 35, often still unmarried, who financed their journey with savings from harvests after the rainy season or from odd jobs in Velingara, Dakar or other rural areas of Senegal, or by selling livestock or land owned by their families. However, I did not focus only on those who return after 2012, but also on those who had come back before, more successful migrants, family members, local authorities, wives and mothers, development agents, local artists and young people. The use of structured interviews was limited and data were mainly of a qualitative nature. All the collected information was verified through an extended period of participant observation in Velingara's everyday life and by triangulating different stories, as well as referring to official documents and the existing literature.

Cultural models to live through uncertainty

Unsuccessful return migrants often talk about their homecoming using the French word *échec*, which means 'failure', 'lack of success', also suggesting the idea of 'being stuck', 'blocked', 'held in check'. In fact, they often use the Fulfulde verb '*baarugol*', which has two meanings: 'to block a road or a path' (denotative); 'to find it impossible to reach a place, to achieve a goal or to realise an idea' (connotative). The return blocks the path which allows people to come out from the 'socio-temporal space characterised by economic, social and political marginalisation' (Vigh 2010: 148). Hence, coming back blocks the individual path to being an economically independent *jom galle* (head of the household) as well to *heɓtaare*[4], that is 'the economic and social capabilities to handle one's life at its best', 'a sense of self-autonomy' and 'the ability to formulate purposes and turn them into action in the awareness of being part of a larger social

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[4] Historically, this word *heɓtaare* has also assumed the meaning of social freedom: '*Heɓtugol hoore mun*' was an expression that acquired a strong political connotation in the second part of the 19th century and in the late colonial period to express the conquest of sovereignty and the end of oppressions (Bellagamba 2017: 73-75).

environment that demands respect for its rules and feelings' (Bellagamba 2017: 82). Return migrants complain that coming back has plunged them into *tampere*, a word which means 'fatigue', 'strain', 'weariness' and 'being stricken by a sense of failure'. Indeed, *tampere* has a precise cause: having searched in vain. Once they are back, this feeling of *tampere* becomes routinised in daily life, due to the *baasal*, namely a situation of poverty that feels very difficult to get out of. As many return migrants told me: '*kalaiam boni, tampere wadi!*' (poverty is fatigue, poverty is suffering). *Baasal* prevents a good *jom galle* from resting, forcing him to spend the day looking for someone who can help him, and so losing people's respect. Hence *baasal* is strictly linked to a condition of dependence, which prevent any possibility of reaching a condition of *heɓtaare*, and of maintaining one's dignity (*ndimaaku*).[5] In Fulfulde societies, poverty has always been interpreted as a shameful condition of alienation of 'the control of one's own head', that 'decrease one's noble status', and force the person to 'engage in types of labour which negates nobility' (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995: 401).

Historically, honour amongst Fulɓe Fulakunda is based on a simple principle: 'to be more and never to be less' when one compares with those considered as social peers, and to 'never allow yourself to be left behind'. This concept lies at the heart of Fulɓe Fulakunda's agonistic society, which is still vital, as it is shown by international mobility: in fact, *laawol ley* can be interpreted as a way to (ideally) try to socially overcome one's peers by gaining a better economic position and greater social recognition.

In the past, possession of material goods or cattle was strictly linked to the possibility of stating one's level of *dimo* (nobleness and respectability) (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995: 202). However, one's *ndimaaku* (the fact of being *dimo*) had also to be proven by constantly enacting a set of moral values and behaviours: self-respect (which implies having a cool head in difficult situations and not losing control of what one says or does); being courageous, righteous, honest and keeping one's word; showing publicly a selfless generosity and respect for the privacy and the difficulties of others (which implies politeness and discretion). Following the *ndimaaku* was a way to state (and demonstrate) one's *iwdi* (genealogical origin) and a public expression and reproduction of social classification (N'Gaide 2003: 712-714).

Nowadays, the concept of *ndimaaku* has changed. Historical processes like the rise and fall of the Fuladu kingdom (Bellagamba 2017: 77-80), the spread of Islamic religion (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995: 202), citizenship in post-colonial Senegal, education and integration into the urban world (N'Gaide 2003: 727) resulted in a conceptualisation of the *ndimaaku* less connected to one's origins and to the enactment of a set of moral rules (Ly 2015: 224). Being

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[5] Studying the legacies of slavery in Fuladu, Bellagamba (2017: 72) defines *ndimaaku* as the innate dignity and authority of the elites. In describing the *haalpulaaren* population of the Futa Toro, Boubacar Ly states that *ndimaagu* is the 'free and noble person's honour' (Ly 2015: 89), while Boesen (1999: 83) translates *dimaaku* with 'noblesse' and 'pride'. Analysing the relationship between *ndimaagu* and the consumption of food in the Senegalese region of Ferlo, Ka, Boetsch and Marcia (2019) have defined it as 'a set of norms, practices, values, social attitudes, behaviours, clothing and dietary patterns that the Peul Dimo (=the peul noble) is supposed to adopt in all circumstances' (2019: 7). In describing the attitude of the Fulɓe population in Burkina Faso, Nielsen and Reenberg (2010) define *ndimaaku* as personal integrity and worthiness, taking up the complaint of the local population who affirmed to 'have lost their ndimaaku' and hence 'have become like the slaves, depending upon others' (2010: 149).

dimo has become an individual claim constantly flaunted in the public arena (Ly 2015: 226) – which today, through mobility, social media and the movement of capital goes far beyond the physical boundaries of Velingara – despite one's origins, through modern means, such as money, houses and cars that have replaced cattle in providing the material base of one's honour. Moreover, internal and international mobilities have created a multi-located village (Dia 2015: 43) where resources for the social competition can be drawn from different contexts, and in different ways, escaping the possible moral disapproval certain actions may raise: those who have managed to arrive in Europe and settle there, for example, often send money through money transfer systems with which they can buy houses, land, and other goods, but often few claim to know through which activity those living in Europe earn the money they then send.

Hence, life after having failed the route is about proving wrong the image of oneself as a man who let himself go, who did not have enough moral fibre, patience, and determination to reach a social status worthy of respect. That is why most of the return migrants I interviewed clearly stated that even when a man has to accepted poverty 'as a fact of life' (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1995: 402) or as 'God's will', keeping one's honour is about preventing anyone else from 'holding control' over them (Ly 2015: 100 vol I):

> Camara: In the village they think that we were afraid to cross the sea, but it is not true: you must have been on the road to really know what it feels like. There are two people who died from this village. They ask you questions, but when you tell them what the route is really about, they say that you are lying. But this is just because they do not know...

> Lamine: When I got back, a group of young people came to me for some advice because they wanted to leave. I told them what happens if you are caught in Libya: you could not eat or sleep, and you could be shot at any time. Even to earn one's living in Libya is practically impossible, because you have to hide all the time, even when you are working. You have to return from work after the sunset, using a torch. If someone sees you, you could easily be shot. So, sometimes you don't even have to use your flashlight, if you want to get home safely. But here they think you tell them that only because you do not want them to have the success you could not achieve.[6]

Those who successfully face the dangers of the *laawol ley*, bringing back wealth for the family, are honoured and welcomed as important and worthy people (*jaɓɓe*). By contrast, the one who comes back defeated is set aside, not looked at (*lartake*). He is *woppaɗo,* namely, 'someone totally abandoned by everyone': nobody looks at him or speaks to him or about him anymore. He is beyond the level of shame that is acceptable in order to partake in society. Return migrants' dishonour lies not only in having returned empty-handed, but mostly in not having been up to the standard of their social peers. They have been defeated in the social competition: it does not matter what a traveller had to endure, honour is measured by the conditions that a subject is capable of creating for himself and his family. The first step to recovering one's dignity is to demonstrate that one has control over oneself:

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[6] Camara and Lamine, return migrants, Nemataba, 20/10/2019

in order to show one's *ndimaaku* a man must show and perform *hersa*, a fundamental concept for understanding social relations amongst several Fulɓe groups (De Bruijn and Van Dijk 1999: 44). *Hersa* regulates the behaviour of a real man before society. The attitude of *hersa* is a mix of modesty, self-respect, discretion, politeness, and control of one's own emotions and words (Riesman 1998; Ly 2015). Immediately after their homecoming, several return migrants report having undergone a period of isolation where they barely led a social life. This is not just about the need to recover from the hardship of the journey. It is also about showing an attitude of *hersa* while avoiding being exposed in public.

Unsuccessful returns must also be read in their collective dimension. As the collective hope serves as a motivator to travel the backway and to face all the difficulties of the *laawol ley*, a 'collective disappointment' characterises empty-handed returns. As they have lost vital family assets in travelling the Central Mediterranean route, return migrants experience the so-called 'dark side of their social capital' as a shameful moral burden which they experience in their everyday life (Åkesson and Baaz 2015: 39-40). Walking the streets of Velingara, they can see successful migrants' houses, their smartphones are full of pictures sent by friends or brothers in Europe via WhatsApp or social media, and they might come across a wedding, baptism or the celebration of the Islamic national holiday *Tabaski* held by the family of a migrant.

The dark side of social capital also manifests itself on a supernatural level. While *ndimaaku* consists of publicly demonstrating one's ability to act honourably, implying a model of 'positive' social competition, *bau* (mystical attack) is an instrument of a 'negative' social competition based on the principle that 'if I cannot keep up with someone, I can mystically try to prevent him from succeeding'. These mystical attacks, which can be cast by a local *marabout*, are interpreted by return migrants as the reason for reversals of fortune during their journey and as the cause of their *échec* (failure). Hence, return migrants often end up not trusting their family or friends anymore, seeing themselves as victims of the jealousy of an envious brother or neighbour.

Another aspect to take into account is that in today's Senegalese 'society of getting by', where the contingency and unpredictability of economic life creates a productive field of possibilities (Gaibazzi 2015a: 227-240), one's success is largely seen depending on *arsike* (luck). *Arsike* is the kind of luck owned by people who do not need to work hard to obtain what they desire (Camara 2008: 53). Even if, as Islamic religion dictates, one's destiny is in the hands of God, a man must seek his own luck through his actions where *arsike* can happen suddenly. 'The quest for luck [...] provides a framework for actively engaging with the indeterminacy of life' which does not mean 'to merely control and minimise uncertainty, but also to unleash it and even maximise it', when people recognize 'the signs that might catalyse a radical change of circumstances in their lives' (Gaibazzi 2015a: 13). The hardship of the land migratory routes, for instance, is not conceptualised by the social actors as a demotivating factor, but as a challenge to prove their ability to tame the risk. For those who succeed, surviving gives a sense of moral or divine election, elevating them in a 'moral hierarchy of worthiness' (Alpes 2017: 189). God's will, destiny and luck are emic conceptual tools to give sense to the unfolding of a life trajectory, especially considering the 'uncertainty' they have experienced in

Libya (Achtnich 2021: 156): eventually, the greatest capital that both adventurers and empty-handed return migrants can count on is God's will and one's luck.

Some of the interviewees use the verb *yonndinorgol* to indicate the capacity of a real Muslim to be patient and to endure difficulties as a form of acceptance of God's will. That is why most of the return migrants equate the courage they have shown along the backway with the effort to endure the fate of returning. The necessary willpower to bear the *hersa* and to maintain an attitude inspired by the values of *ndimaaku* is not less than the willpower they would have needed to reach Europe.

Valuing the experience

Coming back does not mean returning to a stable cultural norm but implies an active exercise in the re-invention of local culture (Farnetti and Stewart 2012: 432). Norms and cultural heritage are challenged by return migrants' narratives, often trying to avoid the representation of suffering subjects. Most of the time, when they are asked whether they regret their choice of travelling the route, they often reply that despite not having found what they were looking for, the *laawol ley* should be considered an important experience of personal growth. Fulɓe Fulakunda, in fact, have always considered wise men those who 'demonstrate penetration of mind, acuity, clairvoyance, lucidity, sagacity and finesse' (Ly 2015: 169; II). The *laawol ley* allows migrants to refine these qualities, also giving them the occasion to become more expert about the world:

> Even if you did not earn any money, you have gained a lot here [he touches his head]. You have the experience. This is what will help you. I have changed a lot, even the business I did in Libya has changed me … Even if you do not arrive where you wanted to, you have gained experience. Nothing is lost. I came back healthy, while I saw friends there who became sick or went crazy. My friend died at sea. And others were shot. I saw things... Indeed, I did not have the chance to get to Europe, but Alhamdulillah, I am in good health.[7]

Travelling is not just about a modern rite of passage to adulthood: it is a way to claim one's right to full membership in the modern world society. Return migrants feel empowered in their way of thinking, despite having been dis-empowered in their economic and social condition: they claim that travel experience has given them a new perspective on their own society and it has made them more resilient, more responsible, and more aware about their responsibilities. Moreover, participation in the informal labour market during their journey has given them new ideas and skills to be put into practice at home. They feel not lacking in the experience and the capacity to put themselves back to work and rebuild a new successful personal history. However, they feel they clearly suffer from the lack of material conditions to locally build what they have seen in the world outside. *Laawol ley* has left them the sensation of being fit for building their success in Velingara also: they learned patience, frugality, capacity

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[7] Labi, return migrant, Velingara, 27/10/2019

for enduring hardships, self-resilience, and a hard-working mentality. They have the attitude of the ancient *jambaar* (ancient warriors), heroes capable of honourably facing all twists and turns, and by this attitude they will be able to overcome the 'spectre of bare immobility' and to rehabilitate their own 'reputation [...] as worthy men' (Gaibazzi 2015b: 116). Hence, several people declare having started over by working in an acquaintance's workshop, or by borrowing a motorcycle to enter the local taxi moto business; some decided to breed hens or rams at home, others moved away to Dakar, St. Louis, or other areas of Senegal to also ease the social pressure.

However, several years of absence have often had a disorienting effect on many returning migrants: life in Velingara has gone on, children and brothers have grown up, someone has died, friends of the past have often arranged their life by finding an economic activity, getting married and settling their household. The confrontation with those who remained often raises the feeling of having wasted time and the urgency of catching up. As Bellagamba (2013) already wrote about the Mandinka community of Gambia, the trajectory of a man's life foresees the achievement of economic independence at a young age, in order to reach important goals to enter adulthood, such as marriage and the setting of a new *galle* (compound). In fact, a man's social and economic status must ideally reach the peak when he is between 30 and 50 years old, and it will slowly decline as he gets old, as his children start to question his role of breadwinner:

> What a man wants is to be a father, to have wives and children, to have a family to manage, and to build a beautiful building. And he wants it right away. That is it. On the contrary, women do everything little by little [...] Men are more 'for today': they want to have land, vehicles, to go abroad and come back. They want it *joni joni* because they already feel responsible. When they see someone else's success, they want to succeed too. A woman does not have these problems, she can be friends with a woman of a better condition without feeling ashamed.[8]

To sum up, men are seen as more attracted to activities that allow them to earn *joni joni* (fast); men's *joni joni* way of thinking is linked to the fact that their social status is at stake in the early stages of life; this contributes to the positive perception of international mobility as a way to earn economic independence *joni joni* and to the feeling of having been delayed in case of unsuccessful returns.

In their attempt to make up for lost time, return migrants come to reconsider the value of some economic activities which were traditionally stigmatised, such as the production of coal and the harvesting of dead wood, once considered humble activities which were not suitable for a real *pullo dimo* (noble man): as long as they can be monetised to rebuild one's future, there is no shame. As Mamadu Yero, a local logger, told me:

> The exploitation of wood was started by Malians and later by Guineans. The local people did not like logging because it used to be looked at as a humble activity. But when they saw they could earn money out of it, they also started to exploit the forest. Once, Fulɓe Futa were called pejoratively '*ramasseur de kirine*' (coal

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[8] Madame Sidibé, Velingara, 06/03/2020

collectors). Sometimes you could see loggers coming into a small village and the chief gave them an out-of-the-way place to stay. If they had no money, they relied on a family who used to give them something to eat. Once the work was done, they paid the family back with the money they had earned. As soon as they saw the money they could make, our parents decided to do the same.[9]

Nowadays, the possibility of earning money becomes the yardstick of any activity: economic activities are judged through a 'backward morality', linked more to the income they can generate, than to the activity itself. This is also true for what concerns breeding. Breeding can be divided into levels of importance: breeding of chicken or pigeons is at the bottom of this scale, followed by goats and sheep, while the breeding of herds has always been considered the activity of the nobles amongst Fulɓe groups. Many return migrants accept starting over from a small domestic chicken farm as a good solution to provide for their families, counting on a higher reproductive rate as a way to earn money faster. The capital gathered with chicken theoretically gives them the possibility to also start breeding sheep and goats. The sale of 3-5 goats or sheep, or of a good ram, might be worth a heifer that allows the cattle to grow. The domestic breeding of chickens, therefore, is no longer framed as a typical female activity, not suitable for a real man but the demonstration of the individual effort to bravely rebuild one's life little by little. From an external perspective, it can be said that return migrants accept a sort of 'social feminisation', as they enact a *seeɗa seeɗa* way of thinking, and they opt to carry out activities historically carried out by women in the domestic environment. And yet, the effort of return migrants consists precisely in re-interpreting these activities from a modern point of view that values an activity by the possibility of generating a good income, building one's success little by little, working hard day after day. However, the experience of return often still implies a temporary social dependence, a step backwards in the search for *heɓtaare.*

The IOM's AVRR program: transforming uncertainty into risk

In the last twenty years in particular, sub-Saharan transnational mobility has often been targeted by various international aid programmes that have considered repatriated and unsuccessful return migrants as individuals who must be re-anchored to their own territory through the creation of new job opportunities. Travellers are depicted by these programmes as ill-advised and vulnerable subjects who have gone towards the unknown, ending up as victims of trafficking. Fostering their success is part of a work of propaganda consistent with the 'diffusion of EU external migration policies' (Lavenex 2016: 2) and of the 'externalisation of the borders between the Global North and the South' (Stock et al. 2019). Helping an unsuccessful traveller to succeed in Velingara may show that success can also be achieved locally and not only through the Central Mediterranean route, hence disqualifying the view of international mobility towards Europe as the only way to succeed.

Following the IOM's glossary of migration, assisted voluntary return (AVR) is defined as an 'administrative, logistical or financial support, including reintegration assistance, to

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[9] Mamadu Yero, Velingara, 20/02/2020

migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country or country of transit and who decide to return to their country of origin' (IOM 2019: 12). AVR has the goal of favouring a good reintegration, defined by the IOM as 'a process which enables individuals to reestablish the economic, social and psychosocial relationships needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity and inclusion in civic life' (IOM 2019: 12). IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) was not originally conceived as a tool of development. Nevertheless, as reintegration is framed as a 'process by which a returning migrant re-enters the economic life of his or her country of origin and is able to sustain a livelihood' (IOM 2019: 176), the IOM has implemented a programme with the aim of helping return migrant to start over, financing them with an amount of 1,000 euro each to set a new business.

The programme included a full training week, from Monday to Friday. During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to attend four training weeks, held by four IOM trainers born in the department of Velingara and without a personal history of migration, each involving about 21-22 participants, selected from the lists of return migrants provided by the IOM central offices in Dakar and Kolda.[10] Every training week was divided into two days of dialogue and exchange of experiences, two days of one-to-one interviews in order to fill the business plans out, and a final day for *pro forma* invoices. The latter was probably the most difficult part for participants. According to the business plan, they had to contact a provider to agree on future supplies. For example, if anyone wanted to set up a cattle farm, he should have contacted a *tefanké* (cattle dealer) to sign a formal pre-agreement of the sale. The unusual nature of the *pro forma* invoice in the local economic context – as well as the delay in funding already evident from the beginning – often made this task quite tough.

The *pro forma* invoice is not the only example of the difficulty in applying the bureaucratic mentality envisaged by the IOM to the local reality. The core of each training week was the face-to-face conversation between an IOM trainer and a return migrant to draw up a 'business plan', a document in which each personal project was translated into the bureaucratic language of the international organisation. The business plan consisted of a ten-section form to be filled in by return migrants in order to have their project funded. Actually, the forms were filled in directly by each IOM trainer on their laptop, often copying and pasting from pre-filled texts of already approved projects. Return migrants' answers were not written down verbatim: trainers translated return migrants' desires into a language which could make the project acceptable and fundable by the international organisation. Even in wording, business plans were full of pre-packaged vocabulary. According to the definition by Calkins, business plans were presented as 'forms', namely 'ways to address uncertainty, [...] a 'semantic domination [...] pertaining to the creation and imposition of meanings, that is, the establishment of qualifications, which define beings and their worth' (Calkins 2016: 123).

The first three sections of the business plan concerned personal data, the characteristics of the chosen activity to be financed (including the place of setting, and whether

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[10] The first training week I attended was the ninth of the whole project in November 2019. At that time, there was growing discontent amongst the return migrants in Velingara because funds had not arrived yet, while training courses kept on being organised. At the end of May 2020, the ninth group was still far from receiving funding, as several other ones. The first part of CFA 150,000 was distributed to them as a help for the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the balance of CFA 500,000 had been delivered to all by summer 2021.

it is a new project, the resettling of an old one, or an already ongoing scheme), the level of education, and whether the person had identity documents or certifications for doing a particular activity (as driving licence for those who want to become mototaxi drivers). The fourth part was dedicated to the applicant's previous working experiences, followed by a chart to be filled in with a detailed description of the use of the 650,000 CFA budget migrants would have at their disposal. These two sections stressed two fundamental preconditions for future success: previous experience in the economic sector and the capability of rationally managing money. Here the role of IOM facilitators in reformulating the often-fragmented speech of returning migrants became evident, as shown by the following text:

> The project consists of setting up a beef fattening activity. It is about buying animals, fattening them up before selling them after six months and reinvesting the profits afterwards. Demand is very strong in this area, especially during religious events such as Gamou, Korité, and the annual Ziaras organised in many surrounding villages. Weekly markets are another occasion for selling. Setting up this type of project can be a great opportunity in this area both for myself and for clients, as they will not have to travel far to find good livestock. I will offer my clients very well-fed and groomed oxen. The project requires the purchase of oxen, some materials and equipment as well as prophylaxis and food.

Words like 'location', 'customer satisfaction', 'analysis of the local demand', 'self-sustainability' and 'reinvesting' reflect IOM's vision as well as the intention of suggesting to return migrants the correct way of thinking, which they should use if they want to succeed. The same considerations can be made observing the three following sections in the form, which focus on marketing strategy, competition and risk analysis. Questions like 'who are your main competitors?' and 'what are the advantages of your business over those of your competitors?' implied the acquisition of an individualistic and competitive attitude and of a new rational way of thinking through which return migrants could be turned from 'maladjusted subjects' into individuals fit to navigate the 'modern economy':

> Marketing: I intend to find an agreement with local butchers. During holidays and other annual religious events, I will approach important religious families. I will present documents to potential clients to reassure them about medical follow-up. Finally, I will display my cattle for sale during the weekly markets.

> Competition: Unlike *téfankés*, I will pay attention to the health condition of my cattle. I am going to offer livestock in a better condition to beat any possible competition.

> Risk: The risks I would face are cattle theft and epizootic diseases. I will set up a secure enclosure, I will illuminate the surroundings and I will strengthen surveillance by involving other members of my family. Concerning epizootic diseases, I plan to consult a veterinary technician for health prophylaxis and to always ensure the health of the cattle.

The last point of the questionnaire was about future individual objectives. Despite return migrants often declaring that they saw these projects as individual opportunities and that

family involvement would have been an impediment to their success rather than a help, sentences like the following ones were added to business plans: 'I expect to make someone else of my family work'; 'I will employ family members in my business'; 'I will employ as many young people as possible to allow them to have a job'; 'I will create a large-scale enterprise'; 'I will contribute to the employment of young people, to the development of my territory, and of my country'.

Eventually, declaring they agreed with the guidelines proposed by the IOM did not mean for them to embrace a new way of seeing things, but rather expressed their ability to socially navigate a context of scarce opportunity. Ethnographic observation has shown how reintegration is not so much a question of acquiring a particular way of thinking, rather it is a matter of more practical issues, such as having the possibility of accessing credit or relying on a stable family economic situation. In contrast, IOM AVRR's approach establishes an ideal model of a self-determined subject who makes decisions following his own desires 'through which he learns to recognize and govern himself' (De Beistegui 2018: 8). The 'free expression of individuals' ends and desires' appears in the IOM's conception as a powerful driver to 'generate order spontaneously' through market and competition (De Beistegui 2018: 66). Eventually, desire appears as an instrument of governmentality (De Beistegui 2018: 31) in the framework of a wider objective to better manage international mobility (also) through the implementation of sustainable reintegration.

The traveller and the businessman

The IOM tries to replace the desire for 'social becoming' (Christiansen et al. 2006: 21; Vium 2014) and 'realising masculine adulthood' (Melly 2011: 363) through migration with the desire to be a successful 'local businessman'. These two representations arise from two different perspectives on the same concepts, such as 'courage', 'effort' and 'success'. An important part of the training week was dedicated to motivational videos with the aim of conveying a positive attitude of commitment and resiliency towards reintegration. Videos were in French and showed images of Western landscapes, movies, and people, such as the American actor Will Smith or the computer scientist Steve Jobs, all connected by the motivational speech of a voice-over. Through these videos, the IOM's intention was to convince participants that to be successful in Velingara was only possible if they showed the right attitude to fight against the suffering and the failure they had gone through. However, the words of the voice-over closely resembled the words used by return migrants explaining their decision to travel the *laawol ley*. This appears clear when observing this quote from a video, available on the YouTube channel 'H5 Motivation', which was one of the most used sources:

> You are tormented, you are fed up with this life, tortured by the fear of dying. You suffer because of the anguish that the world makes you live, and you can no longer even look at yourself in the mirror. You have a head full of bad ideas because your soul is colonised by despair [...] You have the right to suffer, but you do not have the right to complain. [...]

> If you believe in yourself, if your desire is really in your heart, no one will be able to stop you, no one will be able to prevent you from living the life you always wanted to live. [...]

> Death is the second essential test through which every living being must pass. You do not have to look for it, it will come to you by itself. [...] What matters is not to die: what matters is the way of dying. I do not want to die as a victim of my own life, I want to die with dignity and pride, like a warrior or a lion fighting with the weapons that life has given to him. I didn't choose my weapons, I want to face death, I want to confront it by telling it that I will not let go. I want to look death eye-to-eye, and say that I have lived the dreams I wanted to live, that I have lived without regrets. [...] We cannot have everything in this world, but we can have what we deserve, and we deserve to have a happy life, we all have the right to happiness. Even you. However, to reach that, you have to wake up, you have to be aware, you have to be strong, you have to take the steps to change your mind. I believe in you. I know you can do it: you are the one who can change things.[11]

Sentences like 'the first action against your suffering must come from you', 'if someone has done it before you, you can do it too' and the final call to die with dignity are the same discourses orienting people towards the *laawol ley*, an apology of the '*Barça walla Barzakh*' mentality which led to the tragedy of the Canary Island in 2006.[12] The route, after all, is about pursuing one's idea of happiness, despite a marginal position in the local and global landscape, despite the risk of dying, despite having to face death in order not to be a victim of one's own fate, exactly as the video states. Furthermore, the video suggests a universal idea of suffering through which we can understand both the suffering of Will Smith's character in the movie *The pursuit of happiness* and the suffering of a person who returned to the Senegalese rural periphery after having passed through the dramatic experience of the Central Mediterranean route. This rhetoric of 'you have no right to complain because your success depends only on you', reproduces that 'geography of blame' masterfully analysed by Paul Farmer in Haiti (2006: 58), which superficially glosses over structural analysis to blame the individual for his/her condition. This highlights how there are 'correct' and 'incorrect' ways of fighting for one's own happiness, defined by a hegemonic discourse that 'attempts to produce consensus and shared conceptions of the world' (Ciavolella 2017: 177). On a discursive level, the adventure through the Central Mediterranean route is in tune with the individual right of pursuing one's happiness. On a political level, however, it does not respect the forms allowed by the asymmetry of power in which subjects live.

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[11] H5 Motivation, Regarde ça avant d'Abandonner - Motivation vs Dépression- H5 Motivation#19 (Video Motivation). The video is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IpubFyxxz04 [last accessed 5/02/2023]
[12] One of the most famous episodes of Senegalese migration was the shipwrecks of the pirogues that were trying to reach the Canary Islands in Spring 2006. Around 33,000 migrants headed to the Spanish islands yelling the famous motto '*Barça walla Barzakh!*' (Either we get to Barcelona or to Paradise!). *Barça* stood as a metonymy for all Europe referring to the successful football team, *Barzakh* is the paradise awaiting the people who die in the '*Jihad against poverty*' (Degli Uberti and Riccio 2017: 354). This motto – as well as the '*titanic tales of* [the] *missing men*' (Melly 2011: 361) who died in the sea – was still well known by the travellers of the Central Mediterranean route, ten-fifteen years later.

Moreover, the IOM's model suggests replacing the hazard of the Central Mediterranean route with entrepreneurial risk. The 'uncertainty of certainty' of arriving in Europe is replaced by the 'certainty of uncertainty' of the local society of getting by. The IOM's high expectations on the individual capacity to manage an independent economic activity trivialise entrepreneurial skills as well as the difficulties in running a business in a condition of scarcity, and it does not consider an individual's social networks.

Eventually, these flaws along with the lack of follow-up, the inability to connect between different projects and to guarantee further access to credit have undermined most of the projects. While in the short term the IOM's AVRR programme appeared to achieve the goal of providing the basis for rebuilding a good life trajectory, in the long run AVRR ended up reproducing the same conditions that led to the great migratory wave of the post-Libyan crisis years: the rhetoric of motivational videos reproduced the same discourses of the travellers; the financed projects often employed underpaid young apprentices who often quit school, perpetuating poor economic conditions and unpaid employment; competition fostered social agonism while entrepreneurial risk and lack of capital exposed return migrants to the concrete possibility of a new failure.

In a report published in 2020, the IOM also recognised how reintegration could not overlook the reasons that led to departure and the 'social environments that have been set in motion by myriad individual and collective acts and forces beyond our control' (Vigh 2010: 159). Indeed, coming back means to restart from a partly old and a partly new position in the multi-situated and interconnected village migrants never cease to inhabit, 'simultaneously acting and reacting in relation to their current position within a social terrain, in response to current constraints, possibilities and configurations of power, as well as in relation to their perception of the future terrain and its unfolding' (Vigh 2010: 160). Return migrants are 'acutely aware of their position in the world today, of their abjection or expulsion from (or persistent non-inclusion in) European modernity [...] a modernity they hear spoken but may never inhabit' (Piot 2010: 166). Still, they want to keep on claiming their 'rights of full membership in a wider society' (Ferguson 2006: 161). Their projects are not just about unblocking their path to the *heɓtaare*, but also about proudly demonstrating they could measure up to a world that has rejected them and that they dream of visiting as tourists one day as an act of personal revenge.

Conclusions

This article has highlighted how return migrants in Velingara conceive their life upon their return using historical local concepts and varying their interpretations depending on the practical situation: if during sessions of AVRR programmes they tend to emphasise their vulnerability and suffering, in other contexts they define themselves as modern warriors.

Indeed, an empty-handed coming back is a pivotal point in one's life trajectory. Living after coming back is marked by a question: how to be global subjects locally? According to Calkins, return can be read as a moment of uncertainty, in which return migrants manifest a high degree of reflexivity, radically challenging all the local knowledge embodied in the

situation. This uncertainty, however, is counterbalanced by the urgency of action as a means of social rehabilitation. The IOM seems to offer a possibility to answer this need, relying on a vision that polarises uncertainty/premodernity and risk/modernity and seeks to turn travellers into businessmen capable of interpreting the future in terms of rational planning. The conceptual error lies in not conceiving the decision of travelling the *laawol ley* as amongst 'all situations when people or collective actors consciously calculate, deliberate and evaluate insecurities, frame options, and decide upon them' (Calkins 2016: 84). Several studies have demonstrated that migrants choose to leave, despite being aware of the journey's dangers. Indeed, 'even when it is risky, migration can hold greater promise of a better future than the alternatives' (Carling and Talleraas 2016: 7). As sustained by Maybritt Jill Alpes in describing young migrants' aspirations in Anglophone Cameroon, for those at the social margins, mobility appears as a good investment capable of paying off and changing a family's social status (Alpes 2017: 65). Ultimately, the analysis of the discursive layers around the concept of uncertainty shows that the way of conceiving uncertainty is a way of governing the future and of defining new social realities and new subjectivities. (Zinn 2008: 7)

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CONJURING THE CRISIS-IMAGINARY:
CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC
REFLECTIONS OF THE CANADIAN RED CROSS

CHLOE MEI YEE WONG-MERSEREAU[1]

The term crisis is used variously to describe the current social, political, and economic climate. However, the temporal implications of the concept itself have not been explored. This project uses affective scholarship as a methodological approach to interrogate the conceptual gaps within crisis and temporality by exploring the crisis-imaginary as it is constructed through the language, affects, and images. The Canadian Red Cross and its various crisis-operations during the COVID-19 pandemic become a case study into the crisis-imaginary. Drawing on both an auto-ethnographic approach and a critical discourse analysis of the CRC's language, images, and the narratives used within promotional materials and training manuals. The crisis-imaginary can be thought of as an apparatus that engenders subjectivities that are occupied by a linear conception of time, whereas the sensorial and embodied experience of crisis signals a more complex temporal relationship. The crisis-imaginary creates certain subjectivities and temporalities that overshadow the lived experience and realities of crisis. The disjuncture between the narratives of the crisis-imaginary and the affective experience of it comes to have a haunting affect. Through language, images, and affects The crisis-imaginary both haunts and structures our relationship to temporality. The everyday becomes haunted by the crisis-imaginary when the supposed ends to crisis narratives never present or manifest themselves. Understanding the temporal complexities embedded in the crisis-imaginary invites us to *find* time and engage with the pantemporal dimensions that evade rational explanations and logic.

Keywords: crisis-imaginary; hauntology; temporality; affect critical discourse analysis

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Abbreviations

CRC: Canadian Red Cross
CDA: Critical discourse analysis
RC: Red Cross
IRCR: International Committee of the Red Cross
LTCH: Long-term care homes
CHSLD: Centre d'hébergement de soins de longue durée –French for LTCH
CIUSS : Centre intégré universitaire de santé et de service sociaux
CAF: Canadian Armed Forces
PPE: Personal Protective Equipment

Introduction

In mid-June 2020, an unassuming email from the Canadian Federal Student Work Experience Program came into my inbox recruiting students for the Canadian Red Cross (CRC). « *Aidez-nous améliorer les conditions de vie des plus vulnérables !* » I was finishing my undergraduate degree in anthropology and found myself in a period of uncertain transition in which the future is already ambiguous for graduating students without the added layer of an international health crisis marked by the COVID-19 coronavirus. A moment wherein the usual identity-crisis of a young person navigating the world becomes intertwined with major health-, climate-, housing-, financial- crises (Roitman 2014: 42; Petryna 2022). Crises seemed to surround and consume my perception of time.

I was hired as a crisis-intervention worker with the CRC in long-term care homes, testing clinics, homeless shelters, and in the housing-crisis call centre. I was not prepared for the affectively laden yet brief encounters and attachments I would make with people in crisis. Even now in 2023 I find myself revisiting and reconjuring the distressed looks, voices, and the hold that these encounters had on me. The memories and faces of the people I worked with on crisis mandates continue to return, affect, and inform my academic work and professional approaches to psychosocial intervention. Although, I no longer have contact with my CRC co-workers and the seniors I worked with in the long-term care home (LTC), they remain with me. They are the ghosts that remain with me *after* crisis as well as the haunting unfulfilled promises, temporal loops, and mistranslations that were present in the absence of crisis-resolution.

Crisis has become a ubiquitous term to qualify our current socio-political present however there is a limited understanding of how crisis affects and is affected by the social imaginaries that haunt patterns of space and time (Redfield 2013; Roitman 2014; Calhoun 2004; Derrida 1994; Rahimi 2021). How does crisis imagine temporality? How does the discourse of crisis reconfigure our social understandings space and time? I explore the narratives, images, as well as the affective experiences of crisis to understand the hold crisis has on people's sense of being, self, and time. Drawing on Craig Calhoun's (2004) work on the emergency-imaginary within the social landscape of humanitarianism as a short-term temporal response to suffering through neutral action, I discuss the crisis-imaginary as a broader iteration of the ways in which crisis shapes the public perception of the world through

sticky discourses, images, and effects of crisis. Using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the CRC's promotional campaigns, documents, and training materials, I engage with Derrida's (1994) and Rahimi's (2021) hauntology to understand how images, language, and affects form a crisis-imaginary that in turn structure the way crisis is experienced by emergency-relief workers. I layer auto-ethnographic reflections of my affective experience working on COVID-19 crisis-operations with the CRC to analyse the powerful hold the crisis-imaginary can have on people's subjectivities. The aim is not to discredit humanitarian organizations and the important work they do to provide aid to many people. Rather it is to consider what has been absent from the discussion of crisis and how the spectre of crisis and its narratives construct a particular relationality to the world through never-ending iterations.

Conceptualizing crisis

Growing up as a biracial Chinese Canadian, I often found my Western education at odds with my Chinese cultural upbringing. For example, ghost stories are common in East and South-East Asian culture. Spirits, ancestral prayers, and cyclical conceptions of life are considered a given but this was often misunderstood or contested by ideas from Western science. Hauntology has been a means of deconstructing fixed definitions and allowing for alternative conceptions of crisis. The word crisis originally derives from the Greek words *krisis* for 'decision' and *krinein* for 'decide' to signal a point of critical decision (Oxford Dictionary) . In the early seventeenth-century the term was used in late Middle English and medical Latin to denote the turning point of a disease. Crisis continues to hold this sense of urgency by signifying a period of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger within which an important decision must be made. In Chinese, crisis, 危机 [*wéijī*], directly translates to 'danger machine,' connoting systemic trouble. Danger can be imagined as the presence of a shadow, or threat that overtakes the machine, the system, and the society.

 The word emergency, on the other hand, originally derives from the mid-seventeenth century Medieval Latin word *emergentia*, which means to arise and bring to light (Oxford Dictionary). Although crisis and emergency are often used to connote similar feelings of urgency and immediacy, their denotations carry distinct meanings. During an emergency, something is brought to the surface or into view, whereas crisis designates the moment of making a critical decision. I focus on the crisis-imaginary because the outbreaks of COVID-19 during the first wave prompted an urgent need for critical decisions to be made. Does the emphasis on the critical decision-making process overshadow the emergency? This is perhaps the first hauntological reading of the COVID-19 crisis in that the focus on the decision to do something does not necessarily address the *something*, the emergent issue or cause. The ambiguity of asking 'how did we get here?' and the inability to pinpoint the precise moment where things went wrong is what keeps a hold over people's psyches and subjectivities.

 Janet Roitman's *Anti-crisis* (2014) approaches crisis as a historical-philosophical object of knowledge by examining the financial crisis of 2007-08 to question this 'super concept' (10). Roitman uses anti-crisis to interject on the current system in which crisis is taken *a priori* as a self-explanatory term that is joined with other nouns to critique but does not itself require

being studied. This self-referential system overshadows our understanding of crisis as a concept within its own right. Crisis becomes an empty category that only takes on meaning as it is combined with other terms. By studying crisis only in relation to an event, Roitman argues we miss two important questions on the concept: how one can know crisis in history; and how one can know crisis itself? (2014: 10). Crisis is mobilized to construct narratives with a particular teleology in which these critical and decisive moments signal a break from the normative 'journey' and pathway towards a better future through some kind of salvation from the current failures. Building on Roitman's analysis, I use Derrida's framework of hauntology (1994) and Sadeq Rahimi's hauntology of everyday life (2021) to disrupt the teleology of crisis by bringing in haunted pasts, presents, and futures. Understanding crisis only within a linear temporal logic misses what is absent in crisis; what is present in this absence; and what/whose voices are silenced. The ghosts of crisis especially those of intergenerational crises cannot be understood through linear logics of causality.

Hauntology as the theoretical framework complicates conventional modes of understanding crisis as merely a condition and/or a historical event (Roitman 2014). Jacques Derrida first introduced hauntology in *Spectres of Marx: the state of debt, the work of mourning, and the new International* (1994) as a new mode of interpreting the opening lines of Marx and Engels' *Communist manifesto* (1848), 'A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism' (2012: 73). In Derrida's re-reading of this text, he was 'initially thinking of all the forms of a certain haunting obsession that seems to organize the *dominant* influence on discourse today' (Derrida 1994: 34). Current public discourse seems to have a certain haunted obsession with crisis as humans have reached increasingly dangerous/critical political, biological, economic, social thresholds and precarious livelihoods (Tsing 2015). Crisis organizes discussions from finance, politics, health, climate to theory on modernity, interpretation and representation as a systematic deconstruction and critique of society (Latour 2021: 139). The logic of haunting is larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being because it is a performative interpretation that transforms what it interprets. It harbours within itself a liminal space or threshold that is no less public than private, neither living nor dead, and neither present nor absent (Derrida 1994: 63). Instead of focusing on the rationality and causality of a particular crisis, I am interested in a hauntological reading of crisis as it brings forward a particular social imaginary of danger and in its wake, promises certain visions of change that linger in the shadows of the crisis-imaginary when they remain unfulfilled.

Sadeq Rahimi's *The hauntology of everyday life* (2021) follows from the genealogy of ethnographic theorizing in psychological and medical anthropology to engage with how hauntology produces meaning, subjectivities, and structures of feelings through language, metaphors, and desire in everyday life. Drawing on the analysis of literature, film, cultural products, clinical settings, and ethnographic vignettes from his fieldwork in Turkey on schizophrenia and political subjectivity, Rahimi argues that all human experience is fundamentally haunted because semiotics is haunted. Language, meaning, and subjectivity is a 'hauntogenic event, as the process that creates meaning also creates spectral traces of the original events and entities that are made sense of' (2021: 10). This is useful for understanding

how narratives about crisis become apparatuses that orient subjectivity as people witness and experience crisis (Agamben 2009; Good 1993).

Hauntology seeks to evoke the endless spirits of crisis that are created through the encounters between apparatuses of language and discourse with human perception, cognition, and subjectivity (Rahimi 2021: 1). Hauntology is 'a mode of understanding power and its working in ways fundamentally different from historical, archaeological, or even a Foucauldian genealogical modality' (2021:1). Instead of attempting to re-establish, historicize, or unearth what was and is considered crisis, hauntology seeks to recognize, to allow to come forward, to speak—that which was to be, that which could have been but never was, the future that hailed the past but was forced to disappear from the horizon (2021: 7). Hauntology highlights the way crisis covertly structures people's affective experiences and subjectivities through the construction of distinct pasts, presents and futures within dominant Western North American and European conceptions of temporality. Non-linear conceptions of time and causality reveal semiotic fixations on linear-progressive time within crisis narratives within the RC as having anticipated beginnings, middles, and endings. Hauntology allows us to notice the multiple temporal realities that creep into the empty spaces, gaps, and silences of never-ending temporal cycles of crises in the north American context.

Layering methodologies

This project layers a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of public facing materials from the CRC with an autoethnographic reflections of being immersed in the world of crisis. Combining CDA and autoethnography enables a deeper understanding how the crisis-imaginary can be considered a haunting apparatus that structures subjectivity and the affective experience of crisis through text and imagistic narratives. CDA is often used to study how language reproduces ideologies, abuses of power, dominance, and inequalities within social and political contexts (Dijk 2015: 466). In this context, CDA offers a means to understand how the CRC uses images and narratives to produce and reproduce affects within a particular social and political landscape.

Using the NVivo-12 qualitative research software I thematically coded the CRC's recruitment and training documents, and public materials such as infographics, policy statements, donation campaigns found online. Using an iterative process, a codebook of themes and connections were created after multiple rounds of coding. The initial coding created a general list of themes including care, crisis, temporality, obligation, aid, humanity, philosophy, etc. The codes were then refined and reorganized to include analysis of the syntax and structure of these documents by coding instances where the font changes, audience, voice and tone. I ran word searches and queries across themes to identify the most frequently used words and phrases in relation to crisis (See figure1). CDA is useful for understanding how the CRC deploys particular words and phrases to construct the crisis-imaginary to evoke certain affective responses and subjectivities. The CDA became the starting point for conceptualizing what I describe below as the crisis-imaginary and the apparatus that follows and territorializes people's way in the world.
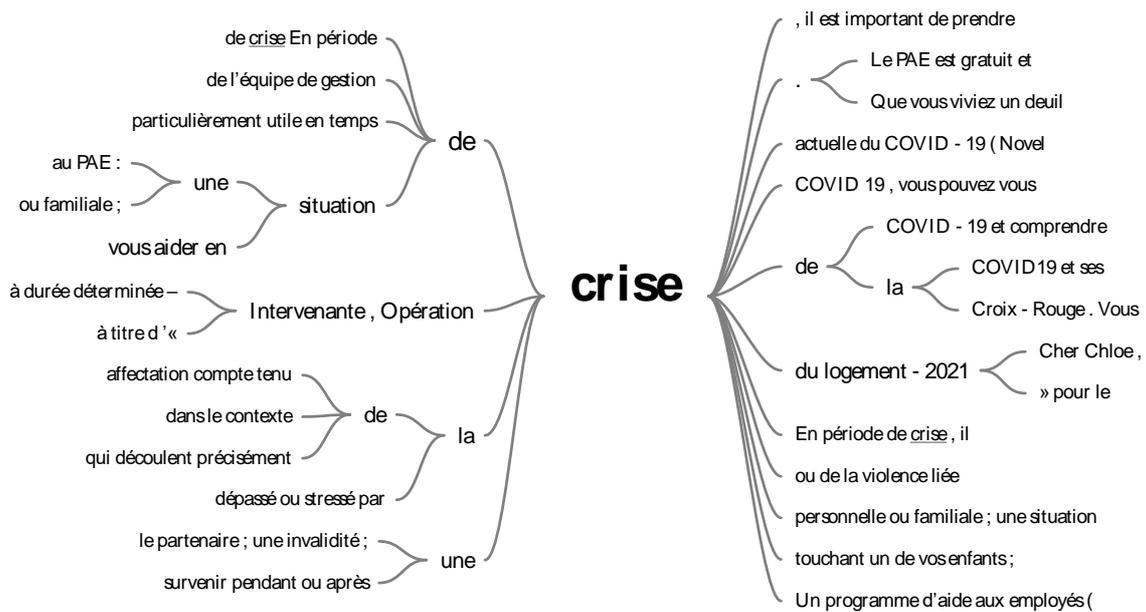
Figure 1 – Word Tree for Crisis, 'crise' in French

In analysing the CRC's images and discourse, if I were to unpack the crisis-imaginary, then I would have to take seriously my memories and reflections of crisis as the starting point through auto-ethnography. The autoethnographic reflections supplement the discursive gaps in the CDA with lived textures experience of crisis. In sharing the affective relationships that shaped my understanding of crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, the aim is to expand conceptions of crisis as a layer of our social imaginaries that disrupts Western linear temporalities. The CRC's crisis narratives neatly locate the past as the place of social critique; the present as the critical point of decision-making; and the future as a space where crisis is resolved and absent. And yet, there seems to be a never-ending cycle of crises, how does one make sense of this? Crisis has become a sign that qualifies a never-ending series of events and its narratives become the apparatus that affects and haunts our subjective experience in the world. Temporally, there seems to be no escape from crises and yet, we hold onto their desired ends. We imagine and hope for that decisive change that will pull us out of the shroud of crises. This is what I conceptualize as the crisis-imaginary: the narratives, visions, affects, and promises of crisis that haunt our understanding of the world.

Conjuring the crisis-imaginary from the CRC narratives

The crisis-imaginary[2] can be seen in an infographic found on the Canadian Red Cross website under 'About the Canadian Red Cross' (see figure 2). In a bright red text box, it reads

[2] Craig Calhoun (2004) coined the emergency-imaginary to explain how emergency humanitarianism conveys itself as a short-term temporal response to suffering through neutrally action independent of any political and national identities (Bystrom and Coundouriotis 2019: 33).

'CANADIAN RED CROSS You may know who we are. But do you know what we do?' The document proceeds to detail the 300 + branches with 20,000 volunteers servicing 2,000,000+ Canadians every year. The infographic is broken up into five sections:

'**OUR STRENGTH**' about the CRC then
'**READY TO ACT** when disaster strikes,';
'**READY TO SUPPORT** those in our communities,';
'**READY TO PREVENT** injuries and abuse- and we help save lives,'; and
'**READY TO RESPOND** out in the world.'
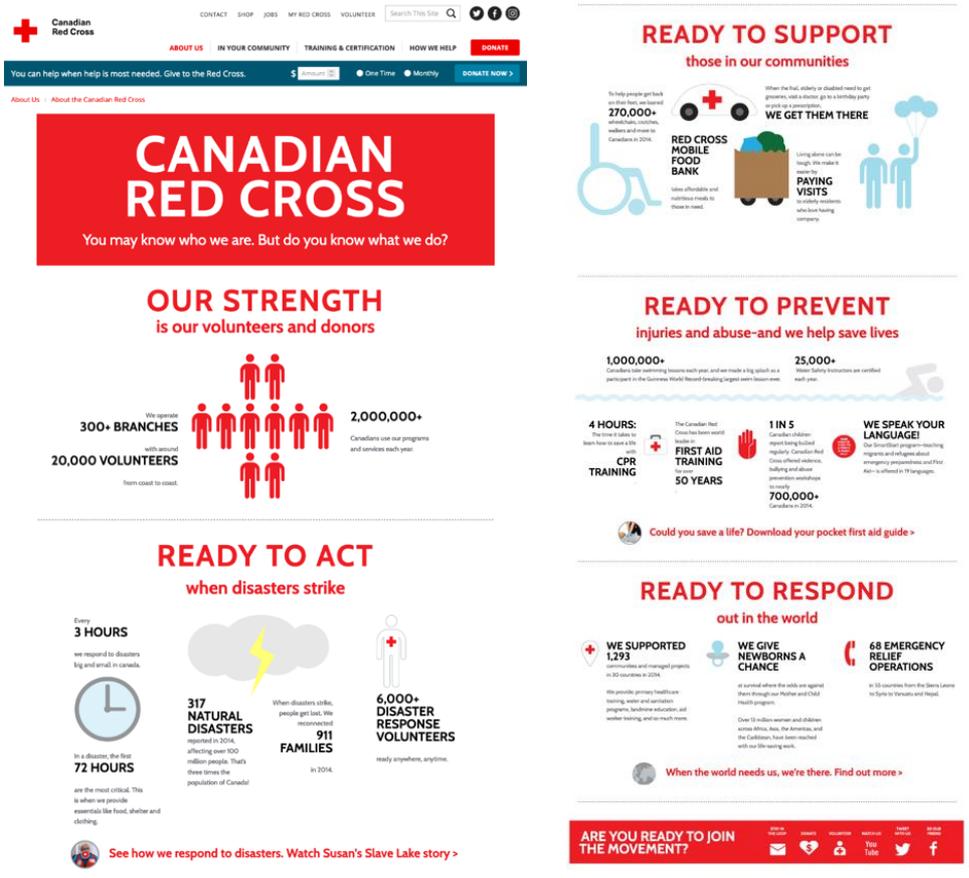
Figure 2 – CRC 'What is the Canadian Red Cross' On-line Infographic

When disaster 'strikes,' a series of emergencies arise requiring the CRC to respond with their established emergency relief programs and their staff and volunteers. One emergency does not necessarily signal a crisis however the conglomeration of emergencies can signal a dangerous systemic breakdown requiring critical intervention. The emphasis of the emergency in Calhoun's emergency-imaginary is on the response, the action, and the timing. Under each section, impressive numbers and statistics are listed like 'every **3 HOURS** we respond to disasters big and small in Canada. **317 NATURAL DISASTERS** reported in 2014 affecting over 100 million people. That's three times the population of Canada!' The all-capitalized lettering written in bold creates an intense affective sense of alarm and anxiety, signalling an urgent need and responsibility to respond. How does the self make sense of the fact that

disaster strikes every 3 hours? The pairing of the alarming text with simple yet poignant animations alters one's sense of urgency as being everywhere all the time. How does one live well knowing crisis is always around the corner? The sentiment that a crisis could strike *you* at any moment creeps, haunts, and forms one's psyche. The threat of looming disaster can territorialize and disrupts one's sense of time and space in the everyday experience of the world. What is left with except waiting for the next crisis to happen only to salvage the pieces until the cycle begins again? The unfathomably high frequency of these emergencies speaks to how crisis has become a qualifying condition of our current historic, socio-political, and economic events and how it creeps into our social imaginaries and takes hold of them (Roitman 2014). The crisis-imaginary is not about questioning whether these critical events are real or not. It gets at the underlying apparatus of crisis as it imagines and reproduces the world as continuously framed around emergency with a supposed beginning, middle, and end. The concept refers to the vision, representations, images, and impressions that orient one's understanding of crisis through these narratives. Crisis narratives carry strong affects of anxiety, and fear that stick onto these never-ending cycles of crisis (Redfield 2013; Calhoun 2004).

Coverage of the first outbreaks of COVID-19 in Canadian long-term care homes (LTCH) brought forward numerous scandals on the deaths, negligence, and abuses happening in LTCHs like the Herron in Quebec.[3] As the pandemic's outbreak spread among the older and vulnerable populations, the LTCHs in Quebec and Ontario were severely understaffed and unequipped to deal with the high number of COVID-19 transmissions and deaths. This national coverage and attention prompted the federal and provincial governments to call on the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) as emergency-relief to support and reinforce these facilities. A month later, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reported that up to 40 percent of the CAF had been carrying the virus asymptomatically before entering the long-term care facilities (Brewster 2020). Fifty-five soldiers were confirmed positive for COVID-19 having contracted the virus from the long-term care facilities, but an additional forty percent might have caught the virus from staying at hotels in close proximity to positive individuals before setting foot in the facilities (Brewster 2020). Shortly after, in May 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that the CRC would gradually take over from the CAF with 150 personnel and an additional 750 newly trained workers in both Ontario and Quebec (Breen 2020).

These representations of crisis reproduced affects of fear, anxiety, guilt, and shame related to the spread and contagion of the COVID-19 virus. However, no stable or specific body, object, or figure can necessarily be considered the origin of the affectivity of crisis because of the way affect circulates, sticks, and compounds with other bodies and emotions. The elusiveness of affect is what allows crisis narratives to collect and adhere to emotions while simultaneously generating particular economies of labour, donations, and knowledge through affectivity.

Brian Massumi' and Eric Shouse's definition of affect and the distinctions they make between feelings, emotions and affect are important starting points to discuss how I along

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[3] The French equivalent for long-term care homes, CHSLD stands for Centre Hospitaliers de soins et de longue durée, see Cherry (2020).

with my colleagues were affected by the CRC's COVID-19 crisis-imaginary and simultaneously affecting these narratives as well. Affects are the 'felt reality of a relation' (Collu 2019; Massumi 2002: 16). Shouse defines affects as a *prepersonal* dynamic force that is felt by bodies as they encounter each other (2005: 1). By body or bodies, I mean the phenomenological understanding of the body-concept as that which has the ability to 'affect and be affected' (Shouse 2005: 1). An affected and affecting body therefore can be understood as a dispositive, a window or a screen through which one comes to know and perceive the world sensorially (Berardi 2013: 64). This relational quality of affects contributes to how they are thought to transfer and move through groups and collectives. Affects therefore gain a social force and momentum through their encounters with bodies. Samuele Collu (2019) conceptualizes affects as *late modern spirits* and treat psychotherapy as a ritual of 'affect dispossession' in those spirits and affects can occupy our present with a haunting presence that territorializes our psychic lives (Collu 2019). In the context of psychotherapy in Buenos Aires, Collu participated and observed over two hundred hours of live couples' psychotherapy to examine the atmosphere and affective intensities that travelled across visual mediums, bodies, and environments (Collu 2019: 293). I argue that affects stick onto crisis-narratives similarly come to haunt our social imaginaries.

The differences between feelings, affects, and emotions and their interaction with one another is necessary to understand how the CRC operationalizes affects to gather support. Feelings are personal experiences, as they depend upon one's subjective experience, whereas emotions are social, in that they can be displayed genuinely or feigned, and affects are *prepersonal* in that they are experienced bodily prior to language, the person, and/or outside of consciousness (Shouse 2005: 1). Affects become feelings once they are checked against previous sensations and experiences. When affects get articulated within a broader social context, they become displays and projections of emotions. Sara Ahmed's article 'Affective Economies' (2004) similarly challenges the assumption that affects, and emotions are private matters simply belonging to individuals that move outward from within before in turn being transmitted onto others (2004: 117). Rather, Ahmed argues that as emotions circulate between bodies and signs, individual and collective bodies 'surface' (2004: 117). This surfacing creates the effect that emotions and affects, in their prepersonal form, are not found within the specific boundaries of a single body, meaning-system, or world. This unbounded quality also reveals how affects and emotions have the powerful capacity to exist, and potentially transform our worlds and social, political, and economic meaning-systems.

Layered onto images and news stories about the COVID-19 situation are effects of fear, guilt, morality, and anxiety that construct a particular conceptualization of the world in relation to crisis. A strong emotional response came from the public following these stories since these effects of loss, guilt, and despair stuck onto people's minds as a social failure. How could a society we had imagined fail so many of our loved ones? The emotions stuck onto the sense of moral and ethical obligation to help vulnerable peoples. And yet, stories of neglect in LTCHs are not new, but COVID-19 pandemic brought to the surface an undeniable public confrontation with the system's breaking point. The horror stories of the deaths within LTCH affected me to do *something* about the situation. This strong sense of injustice was one of the main factors most of my recruited colleagues referred to as their motivation for responding

to the CRC's call. I was not the only *liminal personae* in fact, many of my colleagues expressed a similar sense of disorientation, disconnection, and desire to help in some way. A schoolteacher I worked closely with was deciding between retirement or a career change when the pandemic started. She responded to the provincial press conference by Premier François Legault who called for the need to recruit 10,000 personal support workers for the CHSLDs (Montreal Gazette 2020).

The COVID-19 apparatus and its haunted subjectivities

The CRC job description for support-workers in long-term care homes (LTCHs) represents how the desire to do good haunts the crisis-imaginary and shapes the employees' subjectivities. The document begins with the phrase '*Aidez-nous à améliorer les conditions de vie des plus vulnérables!*'[4] followed by a general description of the COVID-19 context in LTCHs including a list of advantages for working with the CRC, the tasks, and the employee profile they are looking for. The CRC was looking for capable people with a passion for working with older people; great interpersonal abilities and volunteer experience; empathy for people's needs and wellbeing; general knowledge of dementia; autonomy and an ability to work efficiently in a group; and most importantly the ability to work effectively within a stressful environment. The document creates a strong sense of obligation by detailing the 'extremely difficult circumstances' in LTCHs and the 'essential role' you would play in the heart of the CRC's crisis management team (see figure 3). It reveals how powerful these crisis-narratives are in reaching *you* and affecting an immediate response and call to action among the reader. The section listing the five main advantages and benefits of working for the CRC points to the kind of subjectivity they are curating in their employees.

The CRC's crisis-imaginary depends on the transmission and circulation of certain affects and emotions across the boundaries of bodies of individuals and collectives as well as technologies. This elusive and unboundedness might be precisely what allows states to operationalize certain affective responses to crises without addressing broader structural changes. Affects stick onto preexisting ideologies, narratives, and discourses as they encounter them. In the case of the crisis-imaginary, affects collect and stick onto the narratives that surround crisis. However, they also have the creative power and potential to transform this crisis-imaginary.

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[4] '*Help-us improve the conditions of the most vulnerable!*'

Figure 3 – The CRC Job Description for Support-Worker in Long-Term Care Homes

I was compelled by this call to join the CRC through an affective pull that the crisis-imaginary circulated and reproduced through images, words, and discourse. The call represented a constructive purpose with clear directives for the actions and protocols required to respond to such a crisis. The images and narratives of the crisis-imaginary can be thought of as an apparatus in the sense of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Bifo Berardi who describes it, as 'a disposing or structuring device' that, in turn, shapes, disciplines, and orients the gestures, behaviours, opinions, and discourses of living beings (Agamben 2009: 14). My experience working on the ground in crisis-intervention however, brought into view the disposing devices that the crisis-imaginary had constructed. Crisis was the dispositive that structured our subjectivities and relations even in the absence of an immediate emergency. The temporality crisis disposes us to is one in which there is a clear breaking point marking the critical moment that leads to a proposed change or decision.

Mrs. D was a Chinese mathematics professor in her 80s who had immigrated with her husband to Canada later on in life to be closer with her daughter. I learned from her daughter that Mrs. D had survived COVID-19 and covid-related pneumonia twice. Although she was out of the intensive care unit (ICU), her husband had not survived but Mrs. D did not know he was dead. She thought the LTCH staff were purposefully keeping him from being with her. I only learned these details much later during my time at the LTCH, but these details have come to haunt the way I think back on the interactions I had with Mrs. D. Before I knew the precise details of her story and resilience, I had only the affective interactions we had shared from which I had already sensed the force of her sharp wit, and strong will.

Mrs. D spoke barely any English and even less French so our interactions were limited to the broken Mandarin that I used to greet her and ask how she was. My limited language skills kept us in a loop of introductions, '*ni hao ma? ni jiao shen ma?*' [[How are you? What is your name?] to which she would respond '*wǒ bù hǎo*' [I'm not good]. I repeated the phrasing to my mother once I got home, and it turned out that Mrs. D had been saying '*wo bu hao*' [I

am not good] all day long to me. It broke my heart to hear that all day long she had been telling me she was not good, but I was determined to learn a few more phrases to break some of the isolation she was feeling. I carried a notebook with translated phrases, *ni kou ke ma?* [are you thirsty?]; *ni èle ma?* [are you hungry?]; *ni lèile ma?* [are you tired?] At first these phrases were useful, but words only took us so far, and when words failed us, we would sit listening to Chinese opera. Sometimes she would tap her finger against the wheelchair, sometimes she would hum and sing along. A few times, I left her with my notebook and a marker, and she began to write (see figure 4). She taught me how to write the Chinese characters for numbers and repeated them out loud slowly so I could pronounce them properly.
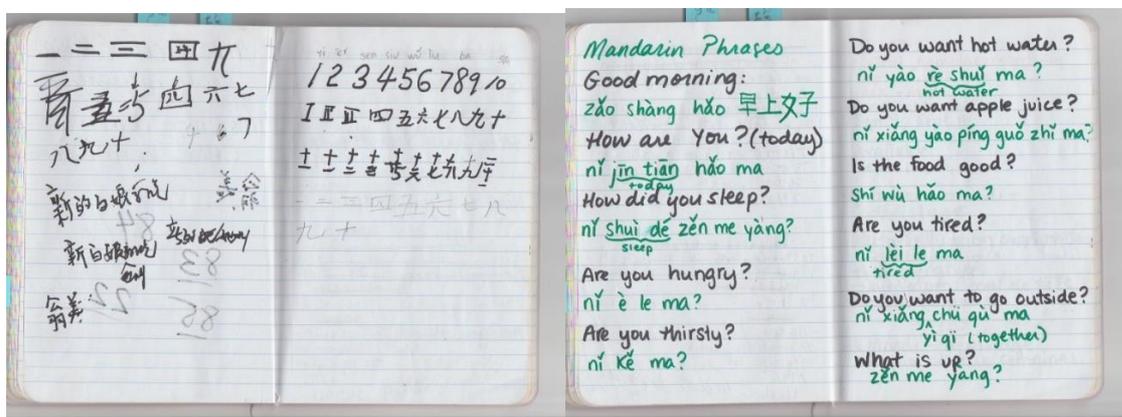
Figure 4 – Fieldnotes and Writings from Mrs. D.

Unearthing, or unpacking what she was feeling or thinking was not possible so we would often sit silently sharing these moments of intense uncertainty, confusion, and alienation peacefully in company. One hand over a rubber glove, a strange form of contact and relationality between the multiple barriers of both language and protective materials. Holding hands-arms-wheelchairs-walkers, became one of the only contact zones that connected me and Mrs. D and other seniors. As opposed to the game-over response, we sat together holding tightly onto our hands, connecting through gloves, wheelchairs, and masks through the trouble (Haraway 2016). Succumbing to the despair of the pandemic is not a generative response for the seniors, and neither was blind optimism. Instead, seniors-doctors-staff, PPE materials and support technologies were assembling into an oddkinship which expands traditional conceptions of relationality. I got to know intimate details about the seniors, the incredible lives they lived, the intimate details of their families, and relations who were unable to visit during the pandemic. But at the end of the day, when I would say 'zàijiàn,' a panicked look would come across Mrs. D's face, and she would hold on tightly to my hand refusing to let me go. Keeping a brave face while trying to reassure her that I would be back soon was the only response I could give without breaking down myself.

I often find myself returning to the memories of quietly greeting Mrs. D in the morning with a warm face towel and wondering where she is now. The feeling that I had so quickly come and gone from her life with no conclusive sense that I had succeeded in providing her

with any enduring relief continues to follow and haunt my subjectivity. When I was confronted with the breakdown of what I had imagined and learned crisis to be, did the apparatus of crisis become visible. The crisis-imaginary reminds us that it is a structuring device that imagines the world through a particular lens with a particular temporality.

A pantemporal experience of crisis

The lived experience of crisis as it affected me was different from the linear narratives I had been exposed to during the CRC training. These narratives structured my understandings of crisis as having a before, during, and after. The long-term care home at the time of our arrival was not *in emergency* anymore. However, the risk of the COVID-19 virus was ongoing and the narratives of crisis-imaginary hauntingly present: the memories of what had occurred were real and they occupied the spaces and relations between people in the LTCH. Only slowly, over lunches with the permanent PSWs, did my CRC colleagues and I learn how bad the outbreaks had gotten. They had been down to one PSW for twenty residents, which meant twenty residents to help dress, bathe, feed, and monitor their activities. Many of the seniors were positive and symptomatic with the first COVID-19 variant, which seriously affected their breathing. Although there were no active COVID-19 cases, the staffing shortages were still so significant that the long-term care home functioned as though it was still in crisis mode since of the 10,000 newly recruited orderlies Premier Legault had hoped to hire, only 3,000 actually completed the training. Our contracts in the LTCHs were considered temporary, and the roles we played were limited, which caused tension between the permanent CHSLD staff and the temporary CRC workers. The fear of a potential outbreak is what kept haunting the present moment even as the day to day work was not always characterized by frantically running around with too much to do and not enough hands. It took time for me to learn and unlearn what my responsibilities as an emergency worker entailed on the ground as opposed to the formal training I had received in an isolated hotel conference room.

As I got to know the PSWs, and the residents, their likes, and dislikes and how I could support them, the anxieties and fear of the COVID-19 crisis calmed down and it became like any other job. Yet, at same time, the fear of exposing the residents to the next wave of the virus was ever present. Being in the LTCH revealed that the experience of crisis is not a straightforward one with a clear beginning, middle, and end. It has ebbs and flows, moments of extreme duress, and risk as well as the moments of calm, quiet, strength, and resilience.

During the time I spent with the seniors at the LTCH, I was confronted with a very different relationship to time than the one the crisis-imaginary had prepared me for. Many of the seniors had varying degrees of dementia and Alzheimer's and forgot that they were in a long-term care home all together, let alone that we were locked down amid a global pandemic. As CRC employees, we were fixated on stabilizing the risk of infection by supplying and providing PPE, and psychosocial support to seniors and PSWs. This was our entire *raison d'être*—reason for being there—but the seniors did not share the same crisis fixations . They did not care much why I wore a mask, gown, gloves, or a visor. They thought the PPE was a silly costume to protect myself from the cold even in the height of the July heat. What was

on the menu for lunch or dinner was more important than the end of the pandemic. It often felt like I was stopping them from doing what they wanted. They wanted to go home or be anywhere else than within the walls of their rooms, the dining room, or the hallway where they would wait for mealtime. They walked around searching for a way home: asking me for bus money, and when I said I had no money they would say, '*oh you shut up you.*' Some would ride the elevator up and down all day long with their lipstick on and handbag in arm with nowhere to go. When I would ask where they were going, they would reply, '*I don't know.*' Others would burst into inconsolable tears asking me where their mother was. Others spent the day flipping through family photo albums, remembering the details about each of their children and grandchildren only to reach the end and ask once again if they had shown me their beautiful grandkids. The space and time in the LTCH seemed stuck in simultaneously the past, present, and future. As though we were all waiting for something magical to clear the cloud hanging over us and propel us forward.

I could have easily succumbed to the frenetic discourse of the crisis imaginary while on the ground working, but how productive would that have been? Part of my job was to provide psychosocial support to seniors, and so I could not dwell on the doom and despair. Instead, I had to come up with creative ways to connect, engage, and repattern my social interactions with both the seniors and the support-workers. This is what I understand Haraway to mean when she says, 'in passion and action, detachment and attachment, this is what I call cultivating response-ability; that is also collective knowing and doing, an ecology of practices' (2016: 34). I held on closely to my role and response-ability on the crisis-management team in a detached yet deeply attached way.

Thinking through my encounters with the residents and staff in LTCHs, and the PPE materials and the spaces of the clinic and the virus itself, there was a process of becoming-with the COVID-19 crisis that prevented me from succumbing to the despair and doom of the pandemic. The situation was and continues to be extremely difficult for burnout staff, sick and/or anxious senior-residences as they gown up in the PPE. The PPE have quite a dystopian-apocalyptic appearance and many of the residents could not recognize us when we were completely suited up. The residents found creative ways to connect with us despite the barriers posed by the PPE. They listened to our voices; looked for our eyes, or our hairstyles to recognize and identify us. The materials gave meaning to the work I was doing and became direct signs for the COVID-19 crisis in the way Haraway outlines material semiotics as a worlding process in which the materials give meaning (2016: 12). I drew comfort from these materials, sitting in them for hours only to change into new ones every four hours. Even after the CRC left the LTCH, and even as I navigated spaces within the CRC's crisis-imaginary and beyond it, these materials continued to shape, and orient my experience of the world. My subjectivity had become consumed with the PPE materials, and the COVID-19 technologies (weekly COVID tests, ventilators etc.).

Hauntology is my way of reading the narratives of the crisis-imaginary alongside my relational experiences of loss, grief, heartbreak, anxiety, strength, and resilience as I affectively encountered them with people, spaces, materials, memories, and time. Hauntology becomes the answer to Haraway's prescient question, 'how can we think in times of urgencies *without* the self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse, when every fibre of our being is

interlaced, even complicit, in the webs of processes that must somehow be engaged and repatterned?' (Haraway 2016: 35). Hauntology is not just about exorcising the ghosts and spirits that come to territorialize space and minds; rather, it is an ontology of absences and a disavowal with the ontologies of the present.

Instead of focusing on being as it is in the present, hauntology is about being with what is absent. Absent space, absent people, absent time, and absent meaning. It both recognizes the disorientation, the disjuncture of time and space as much as it animates meaning, being and time (Rahimi 2021). Loss and absences are not experienced chronologically and cannot be conceptualized within rigid linear logics. Rather, as Rahimi writes 'the logic of hauntology belies any established order of meaning, insofar as it recognizes as haunted (and hence always duplicitous) the very 'essence' of reality, and perhaps more importantly, insofar as it simultaneously defies the most foundational tenets of both Utopianism and Messianism' (2021: 5). The legacies of the utopian and messianic visions of the humanitarian world haunted the lived experiences of crisis especially since I never got to see these visions come to light. The moment the situation had seemed somewhat stable, we were sent into the whirlwind of another crisis-operation.

My affective experience of crisis continues to haunt and transform my understanding of the crisis-imaginary. The affects tied to these relationships continue to haunt my sense of time as I long for returns to a stable *before* crisis or a progressive new futurity. However, it is not just the grief of having lost lives, lost time, or lost connection, rather it is a nullified possible future that was promised and never experienced that haunts us. Rahimi notes that 'what haunts is not that which is gone, it is that which was expected to come but whose condition of arrival has been foreclosed, and the ghost is an advocate of the promised future that was unrightfully cancelled when the past was destroyed' (2021: 6). I expected my work with the CRC to have a decisive point signalling the end of crisis, but the promised resolution never came. The contracts kept getting prolonged, but I could not work full-time with the start of the new semester, so I was deployed as a part-timer on another crisis-operation. In the process, I lost the connection and relationship I had formed with the seniors, but the memories and affects lingered and followed me.

Hauntology thus is a deeply political project that acknowledges the absences and hears the voices of the silent without proscribing to any formal political parties. It foregrounds the moments spent sitting in the presence of absence: listening to the silences of crisis as much as the cries and the screams; embracing the irresolute clouds of uncertainty; sensing what cannot be said as expansive possibilities.

My relationship to time is and will forever be haunted by this disjointed experience where the past and future were present, but the present was absent. A time during the pandemic when we were seemingly locked down in the present but wherein the residents of the LTCHs collapsed the past into the present and I collapsed the future into the present. This characterizes the pantemporal formulation of human thought and experience (Rahimi 2021: 19). One of the fundamental implications of hauntology on the experience of being and time is how 'hauntology indicates a disjointing of time where the past and future are present, and present is absent' which consequently necessitates a *pantemporal* formulation of human thought and experience (2021: 6). This frames the experiences I shared with Mrs. D and many

of the seniors whose understanding of the pandemic was absent, but their past ever present. As their support worker and caregiver, I performed and played out those pasts while simultaneously carrying the concerns for their futures. For instance, one senior thought we were staying at a ski resort and that her husband was off skiing, but she had decided to stay in for the day. The CRC support workers and the PSWs went along with her because it would have been more distressing and confusing for her to understand the strange condition of the COVID-19 lockdown.

The examples from my experience working in the long-term care homes find meaning within the pantemporal hauntological framework and so do the experiences in the testing clinics and the housing-crisis. The COVID-19 testing clinics presented a separate challenge of never-ending lineups of people worried, stressed, and frustrated about their test results. And yet there were periods in the clinic that were similar to my experience in the LTCH, when I spent the day doing sudokus by the front door, testing perhaps a few hundred people. Then come winter, or a time for seasonal travel, it would be nonstop all day performing over a thousand tests per clinic. We had to turn people away and implement a system for appointments because the clinics could not manage the huge number of tests. The days I spent at the CRC's head office as an interventionist on the housing crisis were often very quiet. There would be a short list of calls to make—one or two at most to make in any given day—but we had to keep our phone line open in case someone called.

The training had set up an expectation that the phone lines would be ringing nonstop once July 1st, 2021, rolled around, the typical moving day for Quebeckers. This mandate provided people who were being evicted because of rental spikes, financial insecurities, and/or personal issues with temporary housing, food, and psychosocial support while they searched for new homes. In the CRC's psychosocial support training, we were taught how to pay attention to the whole phone call and not only what was being communicated by the client because the beneficiary's safety and security became the CRC's responsibility the moment we responded to the call. Although the phone calls were few in a day, some of them could be quite intense. There was a call I vividly remember because the beneficiary mentioned splitting up with her partner and needing to leave as quietly as possible while her partner was at work for fear that it would stir her up too much. '*Ça brasse trop,*' she kept saying to me. Those words burned into my ear over the phone. I asked if she felt like her safety was threatened. '*Ça brasse trop.*' I paused the call to speak with my coordinator and we decided to book her a hotel room immediately so she would have a safe space to go to. The client was grateful for the option but felt there would be less conflict if she left while he was at work the next day. I had just enough time to give her the number for our evening psychosocial worker before the phone call was over. No resolution, and just the sound of hesitancy and fatigue in a stranger's voice over the phone was enough to haunt me.

The stories represent shared encounters that were haunted not necessarily by evil tormented spirits, but the ghosts both metaphoric and real that occupied and territorialized the gaps and spaces between those encounters. One of Rahimi's core ideas is that the interface between the physical and symbolic is where meaning and ghosts are born (2021: 6). As my physical, and embodied experience of working on the COVID-19 crisis operation intersected with the narratives implicated in the crisis-imaginary, particular meanings and

ghosts were born: the ghosts of the crisis-imaginary. Ghosts do not follow a linear order of before, during, and after crisis. They stick onto the words, narratives and affects that come to structure our experience of crisis and construct the crisis-imaginary. Even as I continued to work on various other mandates for the CRC, in the COVID-19 testing clinics across the city of Montreal; or the seasonal homeless shelters; and the housing crisis, the ghostly memories of being in LTCH animated the crisis-imaginary and continued to structure my subjectivity, and the meaning I make with the world around me.

Conclusion

The experience of crisis was overshadowed by the expected end to crisis; the promises for returns to a romanticized past; and a progression towards a brighter future. In the place of the expectations and promises of the crisis-imaginary, I found a haunted present. There were days that often felt slow as though I was stuck in time with no way out but the eventual phone call and the sudden spike in cases kept us there. There were stressfully bitter moments that left me disheartened and frustrated yet enough kind gestures that brought the compassion and tenderness to keep me going. The crisis-imaginary is full of these ebbs and flows. Full of contradictory moments of control over the situation and then intense insecurity; or moments of strength and resilience and then moments of intense vulnerability, and precarity.

In September 2021, I stopped working for the Canadian Red Cross, but the crisis had not ended by any means. I had decided not to be deployed on another crisis-mandate and start graduate school. Although my position with the CRC was always temporary—each contract lasting only about one to three months—I ended up working for the CRC for over a year. I bounced around from contract to contract and I could always count on my contract being prolonged for another three-months until the next crisis-intervention. What ultimately began as a way out of my liminality as an undergraduate student during the COVID-19 pandemic became a further entrenchment into the liminal space of the crisis-imaginary. The neat narratives of crisis I had learned in training no longer made sense, but the apparatus of these discourses continued to haunt and weigh on my subjectivity as I navigated the day-to-day tasks of managing crisis.

The crisis-imaginary haunts-- not only in the psychological intensity of these interactions--but also through the language, images, affects that construct the apparatus of the crisis-imaginary. The apparatus forms temporally linear conceptions and expectations of resolved crises that we cling onto which territorialize people's subjectivities. It is the apparatus of the crisis-imaginary and the affects that stick to it that haunt and orient our subjectivities and relationships to the world as being in constant threat of disaster and stuck in a linear trajectory. However, crisis as it is experienced on the ground disrupts what the crisis is imagined to be. The unfulfilled promises of the crisis-imaginary and the ambiguity of unending crisis; and the collapse of linear direction come forward.

The goal is not to abandon the crisis-imaginary, but to reveal the apparatus that is haunting our subjectivities. Perhaps the act of noticing these multiple and alternative experiences of crisis alongside the bulldozing narratives, opens the transformative possibilities

of the crisis-imaginary to reimagine our present critical conditions. Paying attention to the pantemporality of crisis might relinquish the hold that these fixed ideas and singular expectations of managing crisis have over us. The crisis-imaginary holds a potential for representing the many affective experiences of crisis through time and space. As it stands, crisis-narratives produce and reproduce linear conceptions of time with distinct befores, durings, and afters to crisis. This assumes and upholds a teleology that societies are continuously advancing towards a better, and more progressive future wherein crisis is finished, resolved, and gone. The affective experience of working during crisis, however, tells a different story. One that remains unresolved, oscillating between moments of intensity and calm with no clear beginnings and endings. Sitting down to write about my experience reopened these overwhelming affects of loss and grief that I had not allowed myself to process in the midst of moving from one crisis-imaginary to the next. This research represents the first reflections on what I call the crisis-imaginary and in the spirit of hauntology, I hope to continue revisiting these affective experiences to expand on what is absent in crisis through future projects and collaborations.

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CAMELIA DEWAN. *MISREADING THE BENGAL DELTA: CLIMATE CHANGE, DEVELOPMENT, AND LIVELIHOODS IN COSTAL BANGLADESH.* SEATTLE: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON PRESS 2022, 245 P. ISBN: 9780295749617

AISHWARYA MUKHOPADHYAY[1]

Camelia Dewan's first book, *Misreading the Bengal Delta: climate change, development, and livelihoods in coastal Bangladesh*, is an ethnographic critique of development policies enforced by international bodies and governments. It highlights the complexities of the local ecology and describes the precarities of the everyday life of those living in coastal Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is located in the largest delta of the world and frequently faces cyclones, leading to flooding and loss of life. International aid is thus often directed towards controlling the flooding by building embankments. In the first chapter, Dewan traces out a historical relationship between society, colonialism, and the climate. The constructing of embankments was long in practice, but these embankments caused more waterlogging and suffered frequent breaches. During imperial rule there was an attempt to introduce Western scientific knowledge in Bengal and embankments eventually led to the growth of railways and roads. However, today, international bodies overlook these complex histories, which Dewan (drawing from Hulme 2011: 245-266) terms as 'climate reductionism'.

The second chapter then shows how, in today's day and age, embankments are seen as crucial protective infrastructure by international agencies. Dewan argues how development is performative and a collaborative meaning-making practice. She highlights how official narratives of development projects, when conveyed in English, reemphasise the internationally accepted narrative. However, when spoken in Bangla, there are often more meaningful and critical conversations which counter the international narrative. By using climate change as a 'spice', development brokers are often successful in attracting funding which is more aligned to Western discourse.

The third and fourth chapters highlight how these policies are affecting the people in the coastal region of the country. The third chapter focuses on tiger prawn cultivation and its impact on the people living there, detailing incidents of human rights violations, the lack of freshwater fish due to salinity, and rampant deforestation and encroachment of mangrove forests. The fourth chapter discusses the Green Revolution and the introduction of high-yield variety rice, which requires toxic fertilisers and pesticides. Dewan highlights how traditional agriculture is seen to be inefficient and unsustainable, when in reality, the people believe the grown food would give them strength (*shakti*) and not be *bhejal* (impure, adulterated). The fifth chapter focuses on the everyday vulnerabilities and precarities of people living in this area. Dewan draws on larger themes about social issues like dowry, health, unemployment, and education in Bangladesh, which highlights the lack of involvement of the state.

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Dewan's climate ethnography is able to deliver what it aims to address, giving a deep insight into the policy and development sector in coastal Bangladesh and highlighting the difficulties of local citizens. In particular, Dewan's grasp over the Bengali language, and the accurate translation and transliteration of Bangla words elicits praise. Her deep knowledge of the functioning and scientific understanding of the embankments and siltation, and the three kinds of floods (*borsha*, *bonna* and *jalaboddho*) gives the ethnography an insight to local understandings of climate and climate change.

Throughout the ethnography, Dewan is able to build a stark contrast between the aid-workers in Dhaka who disburse funds and discuss policy, with the local people of Nodi and the real life impact these policies have on them. Another point of praise is her inclusion of colonial data in the first chapter, which gives a *longue durée* approach to the relationship shared between Western science and technology, indigenous understandings, and climate change. Most importantly, this book delivers on the aim to critically discuss Western policy and understand local knowledge, which has essentially turned into a decolonialisation project. It concludes by highlighting the role of engaged anthropologists and the importance of qualitative research, which is a stark contrast to quantitative research endorsed by funding bodies.

Two points of critique came up while reading the book. First, Dewan, while highlighting different facets, does not focus on any citizen-led organisations or groups which resist the policies of international funding bodies. These discussions of resistance could have given the book another dimension. Second, while there is a rich usage of photographs throughout the book, there could be more maps comparing colonial and present-day representations of the coastal area. This inclusion would highlight how far the colonial state 'developed' the region compared to the progress made by the postcolonial state.

Misreading the Bengal Delta: climate change, development, and livelihoods in coastal Bangladesh highlights how the ecologically sensitive area has been, and is currently being, 'misread' by international bodies on multiple accounts. It also highlights the ways people negotiate their everyday lives amidst this precarity. It is a must-read for any scholar who seeks insight into how aid distribution and policy making works in a postcolonial and neoliberal state and wishes to delve into the politics of the region.

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DANIEL A. VILLAR[1]

Ethnobiology often sits awkwardly between biology and anthropology, conforming to neither field's paradigms, and failing to reach the front row in intellectual debates within either discipline. Despite over a century of research, ethnobiology is still, in many ways, finding itself, and trying to figure out how best to be both a natural and a social science. Because it straddles this boundary, many ethnobiologists end up focusing on either the cultural or the biological elements of the discipline, publishing in a variety of journals and using different methods, only meeting in the few journals that they share, such as *People & Nature* or the *Journal of Ethnobiology*. Studying the biological interaction between humans and nature with the objectivity demanded of a natural science, and the cultural meaning of the natural world with the cultural sensitivities and reflexivity of an anthropologist, is no easy task. Thankfully, it is one that Phillip A. Clarke managed in his book *Aboriginal peoples and birds in Australia: historical and cultural relationships*. At the beginning of his book, Clarke says that the ideal ethnobiologist 'is a zoologist or ecologist with anthropological or linguistic training' (19).[2] Clarke's background is typical of many ethnobiologists. He was a biologist who, during fieldwork, found that the cultures which interact with the nature which he was studying to be just as interesting as the nature itself. He has been working primarily in South Australia, as well as across the continent, since the 1980s, and often references previous observations in this text. However, this book should not be considered as a final capstone to a career in ethnobiology. Indeed, references to his own work are brief and sparing, and generally are used to illustrate a point made by others. Instead, this is a work of synthesis, drawing together myriad indigenous and western sources to provide a salutary reference work for ethno-ornithology on the Australian continent.

The book is divided into eight body chapters, each of which is divided into subchapters. The first four substantive chapters relate to purely cultural elements of birds – Birds as Ancestors, Birds as Creators, Birds and the Spirit World, and Bird Nomenclature, and will be of greatest interest to social anthropologists and those ethnobiologists that enter the field as anthropologists. However, it also includes information which is of interest to natural sciences, such as the historic knowledge of fossils amongst Aboriginal Australians, and the parallels between this proto-palaeontology and the proto-palaeontology of Ancient China and Greece. There is also a discussion of why different birds were seen as creators, and how certain birds,

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[2] Page numbers refer to the ePub version.

especially ratites, are not seen as belonging to the same category of 'birds' by some aboriginal communities.

The latter four chapters relate to the more biological element of interactions between Aboriginals and birds – Early Hunting and Gathering, Birds Working with People, Food and Medicine from Birds, and Material Culture. The chapter on hunting and gathering is particularly strong, though it deals relatively little with the archaeological evidence of bird hunting. Instead, the focus is on historic accounts of hunting by aboriginal people, with Clarke describing many different techniques, such as swimming towards waterfowl, emu drives, and the use of snares, some of which are still used by Aboriginal communities. This chapter would be of interest to ethnobiologists as well as game managers wanting to understand how hunting can be made sustainable.

A strength of this work is that it historicizes aboriginal ethno-ornithology in a manner which remains rare in the ethnobiological literature. Clarke does not think that modern ethno-ornithological practice and custom necessarily reflects the past – indeed, he takes a dim view of the 'racial memory' literature, which, while claiming to respect indigenous knowledge, traps it in amber, outside of time and experience (352). Instead, Clarke documents how European disturbances lead to some legends and knowledge being lost, and that European influences have become integrated into Aboriginal ethno-ornithology. Clarke finishes his book with a plea to consider Aboriginal ethno-ornithology to be of value, whether it is the traditional knowledge of hunter-gatherers, or the modern environmental knowledge of aboriginal peoples who interact with the land in ways their ancestors did not. Clarke also recognises that more knowledge is being lost than is being created, and that, just as there is a crisis of biodiversity loss worldwide, there is also a critical loss of ethnobiological knowledge, from which Australia is not exempt.

This book is a valuable synthesis of the ethno-ornithology of Aboriginal Australia. While not a wholly original work, it is a valuable reference text, and provides a one-stop-shop for anyone interested in learning about the ethnobiology of the region. Australia has been blessed with some excellent field ethnobiologists, like Donald Thomson, Norman Tindale, and Joeph Birdsell (Birdsell 1993; Thomson 1983; Tindale 1974). Clarke has proven a worthy successor of these individuals, contributing self-reflection that they perhaps lacked. This book's structure combines both anthropological and biological elements of ethnobiology, and provides a template for other ethnobiologists who wish to attempt such an ambitious project.

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GWEN BURNYEAT. *THE FACE OF PEACE: GOVERNMENT PEDAGOGY AMID DISINFORMATION IN COLOMBIA.* CHICAGO: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS 2022. 320 P. ISBN: 9780226821627

DAVID GELLNER[1]

This book works wonderfully well on a number of levels. On one level, it is a history of a crucial period of recent Colombian history. On another, it is an ethnography of the state and an argument about how the anthropology of the state should be done. At yet another level, it is an argument about Enlightenment values and political liberalism – not based, as is usually done, in philosophical mode, on abstract principles or arguments from an imaginary 'original position', but based rather on how the state is embodied and performed in practice.

     The face of peace describes a period with numerous echoes and parallels elsewhere, not least in the polarization that resulted from a divisive referendum, which took place just a few months after the Brexit referendum. The parallel is explicitly drawn on a number of occasions. The Colombian Yes campaign was very similar to the UK Remain campaign: both were expected to win, with a fatal complacency on the part of their proponents. Both the Yes and the Remain campaigns were backed by the government of the day, which was caught in the cleft stick of trying to lay out the arguments on both sides, and to treat them as equal, while simultaneously actually favouring one side. In both referendums there was an appeal to facts and figures on one side, and an appeal to emotion, boosted by a large number of false claims, on the other. In both referendums there was a strong perception that the uneducated overwhelmingly favoured No/Leave. Both referendums were seen as a huge failure of communication and education. There is one big difference, however: the Brexit voter turnout was very high at over 72%, with many people who had not voted for years or decades turning out to cast their vote. In Colombia, by contrast, the turnout was only 37.43%. (There are other differences, obviously, in terms of what the referendum was about and the very different histories of the two countries).

     This book is an ethnography, not so much (or only partially) of the *voters* who rejected the Peace accords, nor of the *politicians* who made political capital out of voters' discomfort with them and of their longstanding distrust of the state, but rather of those people – the NGO workers and civil servants – who tried to persuade the voters to vote Yes. They were often placed in very difficult situations, because they had to be the face of the state or 'give face' (*dar la cara*) as they put it, in rural areas, areas which might have been under the control of FARC, or otherwise been neglected by the state, for many years and have little reason to trust it. The anguish and predicament of these often highly motivated, indeed passionate, activists and bureaucrats, and especially their huge disappointment at the No vote in the referendum, are at the heart of the book. Burnyeat's analysis here, conceptualizing the

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interface between society and the state, is an important contribution to the anthropology of the state and of bureaucracy.

What the activists' efforts showed – as many recent ethnographers of the state have been keen to emphasize – is that the state is a performance. It has to be taken on the road and it has to be ritualized. Even a roadshow about a peace agreement is a performance. In Chapter 4 Burnyeat describes in great detail one such session, held in a rural area called Dabeiba, providing us with a slide-by-slide PowerPoint exposition as delivered by Pilar, the young, urban, educated, middle-class, and very White representative of OACP (*Oficina del Alto Comisionado para la Paz*), sent out to do five presentations to peasant audiences, over the course of four days, of the 'facts' of the agreement. Burnyeat records her own shock that OACP should send such a young interlocutor who was so very different from her target audience. She also honestly records the views of the locals that Pilar, the presenter, was good, that she was exactly what they expected from the state, and that at least some of them were very pleased to learn what Pilar so didactically, and following a narrow and specific script, was sent out to teach them.

Woven into this detailed and compelling ethnography is the wider aim: a critique of liberalism. This means that *The face of peace* is a difficult book – not because it is written abstrusely – far from it. As far as that goes, it is a model of clarity. The book is difficult to read because it turns the gaze onto 'our' too little examined beliefs and assumptions, in quite a harsh, though simultaneously empathetic, way – in fact in just the way that anthropology is supposed to, but rarely does. At least rarely does in a way that makes us truly and deeply uncomfortable.

I say 'our' and 'us' because I would be surprised if the author herself did not share, at least to some degree, the assumptions of the liberal consensus or liberal imaginary. Some of the author's best friends – as the ethnography makes very clear – are liberals, both politically, and in subscribing to what she calls 'cultural liberalism'.

Cultural liberalism believes in the value of education: the solution to bad decision-making, or people believing in propaganda, is more education. Cultural liberalism believes in reason and truth: in the end, reasoned argument and the facts will defeat ignorance, prejudice, and lies. Cultural liberalism believes in the gulf between reason and emotion: appeals to emotion, especially negative emotions and intolerance, must be combatted by appeals to reason, rights, and justice. Cultural liberalism believes in impartiality and neutrality and the possibility of fairness when rules of impartiality are applied. It believes that the liberal settlement – parliamentary democracy, the separation of powers, the rule of law – enacts those values of equality, fairness, justice, and truth. As a corollary of this, it believes that technical solutions are possible. In particular, and in the case we have been discussing, it is possible to keep politics out of neutral presentations of 'the facts' about the peace agreement. Following a well-worn leftist path – but supporting it with deep ethnography – Burnyeat demonstrates that all of these liberal assumptions are myths, just as much as the myths propagated by the anti-peace agreement side. Burnyeat refers to 'the precarity of liberalism's fantasy of rationality' (247) and to the deeply 'ideological' nature of all these liberal assumptions (245). Liberalism in practice has been used as a prop for hierarchies of class and colour. Those propagating the liberal consensus, working for a Yes vote, were overwhelming upper or upper-middle class, sophisticated, from Bogotá, and much Whiter and more educated than those they were attempting to instruct (as well as, in the case described above, younger than them). This kind of 'cultural liberalism' (or what is sneeringly called just 'liberalism' in the USA) is in fact a class attribute and, therefore, a mask for advancing the interests of the elite. As such, it is seen as hypocritical and a No vote (just like a Leave vote in Brexit) is an expression of protest against the elite and a statement of mistrust in the state. Interestingly, Burnyeat demonstrates that – despite the rhetoric of combatting unreasoned

emotion with the facts and the truth – the advocates of peace were just as passionately committed to their cause as their opponents.

In the conclusion Burnyeat quotes Deneen's *Why liberalism failed* saying that the solution to the failure of liberalism is not more liberalism. I must respectfully disagree. I don't actually think there is any alternative. Churchill popularized the saying that 'Democracy is the worst system, except for all the rest'. As Michael Walzer (1995: 25) has said, the project of civil society 'does not make for heroism. "Join the associations of your choice" is not a slogan to rally political militants'. But actually, in a context like Colombia, and many others, civil society *is* a pretty heroic choice. Looking around the world at protests taking place in Iran and China, I do not believe liberalism has failed; as they used to say about socialism, in too many places liberalism hasn't even been tried.

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PETER METCALF. *THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF RELIGION AND THE WORLDS OF THE INDEPENDENT THINKERS.* LONDON: ROUTLEDGE 2023. 216 P. ISBN: 1000782387

DAVID ZEITLYN[1]

In the guise of a textbook introduction to the anthropology of religion Peter Metcalf gives a wonderfully erudite introduction to the anthropological project as a whole. In doing this we are given a take on comparison (comparative religion) that is refreshingly different in not starting from the 'religions of the book', and is clearly explained.

The book starts with 'the Great Project of anthropology, which was nothing less than the discovery of the full range of human possibility' (4). To that end the idea of 'independent thinkers' is crucial. These are different groups of people living relatively independent of one another who have different ways of thinking and talking about the world they live in. As Metcalf explores across the globe, people know their environments in great, great detail, and this is reflected in various ways in their ritual lives. The so-called 'religions of the book', Metcalf prefers to talk of the 'Judeo-Christian-Islamic-Complex', are not very important to this (except negatively by trying to force other ways of thinking into their own categories). Repeatedly, we are given examples of how religions can work very well without theology or theologians.

By starting without any presumptions about how religion has evolved or that any one religion is better than any others (or could serve as an exemplar or a measure of any other) Metcalf is at pains to unpack the difficulties for properly global accounts of religion, and any that seek to talk about more than relatively recent history (say a few thousand years). He uses his extensive knowledge of Berawan death rites as a recurrent case to test the various theories about religion that have been popular over the last 150 years of academic discussion. Most of these are found wanting. He is rightly scathing about the racism and presumption of much nineteenth-century theories of 'primitive' religion, although I note that two of those who emerge well from his account are Robertson-Smith (the primacy of ritual over theology and importance of commensality) and Durkheim (the importance of joint ritual activity).

Along the way we are given some wonderful one- or two-page asides: There is a takedown of sociobiology in its current form of evolutionary psychology (104-105) as well as a robust defence of linguistics against evolutionary reductionism (108-109). Before this, page 53 gives us a beautifully nuanced account of the problems and limitations of the attempt to translate indigenous terms into a metalanguage such as English.

Overall, I think this work has great promise as the textbook it is described as being. However, it is much more than this, a paean to the importance of anthropology as a global 'science', a plea for modesty and humanism, exemplified by the impossibility of ever fully

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knowing anyone else (what is in another head is unknowable), and trying to think through the implications of recognising that as a fundamental part of the human condition.

JUAN MANUEL DEL NIDO. *TAXIS VS. UBERS: COURTS, MARKETS, AND TECHNOLOGY IN BUENOS AIRES. STANFORD: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2021. 256 P. ISBN: 9781503611528*

HONGSHAN WANG[1]

Until late March 2016, most Argentines believed that Uber would not arrive in the country due to historical and political reasons. However, by mid-April of the same year, Uber's presence in Buenos Aires caused the taxi industry to be easily cast aside and rendered it incapable of mounting a response. *Taxis vs. Uber* captures this particular political moment: a time when the Argentine middle class is anxious about the national economic downturn and the loss of its past glory, distrustful of Peronism and partisan politics, and yearning for modernity, cosmopolitanism, and globalism.

Drawing on extensive archival research and detailed ethnographic accounts, Juan Manuel del Nido examines how and why the traditional taxi industry, with longstanding legal protections and political connections, was challenged, and even written off, by the arrival of Uber. The author argues that 'post-political reasoning', which involves the mobilisation of 'the logics, rhetoric, and affects' to organise knowledge and structure the common experience of public life (8), helped Buenos Aires' middle class legalise the Uber service while foreclosing the very possibility of disagreement.

This book consists of eight chapters. The first three chapters delve into the examination of the taxi industry before Uber's arrival. Chapter 1 introduces the political economy of the taxi industry, detailing how it was organised as a public service by the city government through the taxi license. The following chapter documents the bodies allowed to enter the taxi trade, requiring successful completion of professionalisation courses, medical and health check-ups, as well as psychological tests. In chapter 3, the author explores how the standardisation in the circulation of vehicles, bodies, and transactions shaped middle-class residents' common experience of riding a taxi. These chapters demonstrate the substantial governmental support received by the taxi industry and its connections with Peronism and institutional authorities.

Chapter 4 focuses on the intense conflict in the public sphere triggered by Uber's arrival. In response to the imminent Uber, the taxi industry initiated collective legal actions. Buenos Aires' middle-class residents, however, held different attitudes towards the conflict, believing that the taxi industry, built on a monopoly of the taxi license, was a moral aberration, while Uber should stay because 'the people' wanted it. In this case, the political economy of the conflict and disagreement resulting from Uber's disruption was reframed as a moral economy of individual citizen-consumer's choice.

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In addition to a moral category, the next chapter elaborates on how the idea of competition was mobilised as an economic solution to a political problem. For most residents, the taxi industry was deeply entwined with Argentina's political and economic landscape, riddled with exclusions and monopolies. The image of the 'taxi mafia' fuelled residents' longing for Uber's arrival as an outsider and a competitor to the taxi industry. Within the logical machine of competition, Uber's alterity enabled it to become an ally against the abuses of the powerful taxi industry and the political order it represented.

In Chapter 6, the author explores why Uber's arrival was unstoppable and how it became a 'stranger king' through technical terms. Uber's algorithmic labour arrangements and the app's rating system not only (re)produced an 'ordered, orderly order' (134), but also turned taxi transactions from a public issue to a private one, thus fabricating unverifiable and undebatable Uber relations. In other words, platform technologies enabled Uber to participate in the redistribution of the sensible and the empowerment of consumers. As a result, consumers' preferences, desires, expectations, and experiences became the ultimate site of irrevocable truth in late capitalist societies.

The remaining two chapters centre on governmental failures of legal attempts to block Uber. Despite legal bans, Uber dismissed the courts and reassured users through social media campaigns and promotions. The enduring 'trials of strength' (173) affirmed Uber's transcendence over Argentina's juridico-political order and reinforced its entangled relationships with all parts of the Greater Buenos Aires area. Chapter 8 investigates how the narrative of the Argentine technocratic government laid the groundwork for accepting Uber's arrival, and why protests from the taxi industry failed to gain widespread resonance. The taxi industry was perceived as the epitome of Peronism and the recalcitrance of a neoliberal project of a nation emancipated from its political past.

Taxis vs. Uber may be the only ethnographic research carried out while Uber was crashing into a territory. This book stands out for its embedded analysis, which takes historical, institutional, and material contexts seriously, illustrating how various parts of society contribute to a social problem at the ethnographic level. In addition, the focus of this research is neither on labour precarisation and exploitation, nor on the Uber-taxi conflict itself, but rather on the post-political and non-expert reasoning, making it distinct among platform and gig economy studies. The importance of studying rationalities goes far beyond this case; it also offers critical insights into how people understand disagreement and the disavowal of disagreement. As del Nido (2022) stated in an interview, 'it is increasingly difficult to disagree and remain a political equal' in late capitalist societies. This book provides readers with an alternative way to understand economic and political processes through the distribution of parts, voices, and roles in a society, as well as through individuals' common sense and concrete experiences.

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GAYE SCULTHORPE, MARIA NUGENT, AND HOWARD MORPHY (EDS.) *ANCESTORS, ARTEFACTS, EMPIRE: INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIA IN BRITISH AND IRISH MUSEUMS.* LONDON: BRITISH MUSEUM PRESS 2021. 247 P. ISBN: 9780714124902

JACK NORRIS[1]

The volume *Ancestors, artefacts, empire: Indigenous Australia in British and Irish museums*, edited by Gaye Sculthorpe, Maria Nugent, and Howard Morphy, explores the vast multitudes of Indigenous Australian (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) collections within Great Britain and Ireland.

This book is the fruit of collaboration between researchers in Australia and the United Kingdom over the past decade, involving the British Museum, the National Museum of Australia, and the Australian National University. Through the efforts of these institutions and others, it is now estimated there are over 39,000 items of Indigenous Australian cultural belongings and Ancestral property scattered throughout British and Irish collecting institutions, such as museums, botanic gardens, and scientific societies. Many of these collections were amassed between the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries and are the result of Britain's imperial presence and colonial expansion within Australia.

Along with the book's editors, the volume's chapters are written by 19 other contributors, consisting of Indigenous research fellows and knowledge holders, curators, anthropologists, and historians. *Ancestors, artefacts, empire* is a major contribution to the field of Australian history and First Nations histories, as well as collection histories, museum anthropology, and museum practice. The overall aim of the book, as noted by the editors, is 'threefold: to share knowledge about dispersed objects and collections; to offer interpretations that draw those scattered objects together as a whole; and to contribute to processes of reconnection and relationship-building between British and Irish institutions and Indigenous Australian Communities' (16-17).

The book is structured in five parts, Part 1: Encountering Objects; Part 2: Moving Objects; Part 3: Telling Objects; Part 4: Unsettling Objects; and Part 5: Performing Objects. Each section, set out with multiple chapters, examines various aspects of museum practice and collection histories surrounding diverse objects, collections, or time periods and geographical regions within Australia, such as chapter 18, *Rough justice on the Kimberley Frontier* by Ian Coates with Peter Yui; or chapter 20, *Slow awakenings: institutional engagements with Indigenous art* by Howard Morphy and Gaye Sculthorpe.

Along with its extensive chapters, *Ancestors, artefacts, empire* also has three appendices: 1. Museums with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Collections; 2. Finding Guide to Collections; and 3. Researching Collections. These appendices are an important contribution

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to the book, for as the editors state, the book is 'more [of] a beginning than [an] ending' (34), a tool which allows these collections in the United Kingdom and Ireland to be better known. Therefore, the appendices are a valuable guide to researchers, as well as to, more importantly, the descendants of the communities and peoples from which these collections derive. These historical collections do not simply represent 'static assemblages of material culture', instead 'they are creative technologies that enable [Indigenous] people to rediscover ancestral works and knowledge, recover stories, and make new connections and works' (13).

The book also contributes to wider contemporary debates within museum studies and collection histories, namely the colonial legacies of museums and ethnographic collections. Specifically, and topically, the popular narrative that ethnographic collections are comprised solely of stolen 'colonial loot'. This dominant narrative, though accurate for many collections, is, as the editors note, 'only part of the story' (19), as many objects were not solely obtained via violent means or stealing – some were traded, sold, gifted, or commissioned. *Ancestors, artefacts, empire* argues that the universal colonial loot narrative denies the nuances of cross-cultural interactions and the agency of Indigenous peoples, not only within Australia but across the globe.

A prime example which exhibits this nuance is Chapter 15 *'Intimate relations': objects from the Port Phillip District* by historian Penny Edmonds. Edmonds, bringing together historical sources, museum collections and objects, explores the complex and differing nature of cross-cultural relations within the Port Phillip District (later the Colony and now the State of Victoria), observing it was 'a place of confluence, a mixed space of cross-cultural encounter, intimacy and violence' (152). One collection Edmonds examines is the von Stieglitz collection in the Museum of Ulster, Northern Ireland (152- 155). The von Stieglitz collection epitomises the differing nature of cross-cultural frontier relations and collecting, as it constitutes objects that were obtained via frontier violence and warfare, as well as through exchange and gifting. This collection was amassed from the local Kulin peoples in and around Melbourne and the von Stieglitz pastoral holdings at Ballan, northwest of Melbourne, from 1836 to the mid-1850s.

Edmonds also highlights the nuances amongst the obtainment of objects via gifting, selling, or trading, as these relations were occurring due to colonisation, and many, but not all, were also obtained under unequal power dynamics. For example, the agency of Kulin peoples is illustrated in the writings of the colonist John Cotton, who records Daungwurrung people bartering 'opossum skins, squirrel skins… waddies [clubs], shields, and boomerangs' for foodstuffs, such as 'cabbages, carrots, melons, wheat, rice, sugar etc.' (155). Edmonds in her analysis of these practices notes how they represent Kulin peoples' traditional commerce and social relations, but also the necessity to obtain foodstuffs from Europeans in the wake of the British invasion, which had destabilised long-established food sources.

Perhaps the singular fault with the book is the omission of the Saffron Walden Museum in Essex in Appendix 2 (255- 258). Appendix 2 lists the museums and institutions which have collections from the State of Victoria, and the absence of this museum is disappointing. The Saffron Walden Museum contains an important collection from south-eastern Australia, being one of the earliest ethnographic collections from Victoria and the Melbourne region. The collection was amassed by John Helder Wedge, who was one of Victoria's earliest colonists, as the surveyor for the Port Phillip Association. However, this omission is a minor issue, and does not detract from the overall significance of this book.

Ancestors, artefacts, empire makes a valuable contribution to our understandings of Indigenous Australian museum collections, not only within the British Isles but globally. This work will no doubt spark a wave of new research, discussion, and interaction with Indigenous Australian collections currently found dispersed across Great Britain and Ireland.

ARND SCHNEIDER. *EXPANDED VISIONS: A NEW ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE MOVING IMAGE.* LONDON AND NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE 2021. 194 P. ISBN: 9780367253684

JORDAN GORENBERG[1]

In *Expanded visions: a new anthropology of the moving image*, Arnd Schneider investigates the intersection of anthropology and the moving image, with a particular emphasis on experimental film and contemporary visual media. It contains eight different essays that delve into various aspects of this relationship. The central argument of the book is to examine 'what the moving image can do with anthropology, but also what anthropology can do with it' (1). Schneider is interested in the epistemological potential of film innovation in ethnography, which can expand the ways films are used in anthropological research. The collection of essays highlights the potential for multimodal studies by exploring how the moving image informs anthropology and how anthropology, in turn, shapes the moving image. The book is situated within the context of expanded cinema and calls for a radical expansion of anthropology that incorporates contemporary art, experimental film, and visual anthropology.

The essays in the book cover a wide range of topics, including experimentation with art and ethnography, the use of experimental film to rethink anthropological research and representation, the concept of photofilm that animates still images, and the examination of indigenous representation in cinema. Essay 1 begins by defining the moving image as encompassing all forms of film, with a particular emphasis on contemporary films. It highlights the epistemological potential of film innovation in ethnography, suggesting that new approaches to filmmaking can expand the horizons of anthropological research. Essay 2 examines the ways in which experimental filmmakers engage with art and ethnography, pushing the boundaries of representation and challenging traditional disciplinary divisions. Schneider introduces the notion that fieldwork in anthropology should be seen as a dynamic and fluctuating set of relationships between anthropologists and their ethnographic subjects, rather than a rigid and well-defined method (24). Essay 3 critiques experimental film practices and explores their possible relevance for anthropology. Noting that '[experimental film] makes us consciously and materially aware that film is literally a medium, in that it comes between us, our senses, perception, and representation' (48), this heightened awareness challenges the conventional assumption that film simply replicates reality and prompts readers to consider how experimental film disrupts or questions this assumption. Essay 4 explores the concept of photofilm, a relatively niche and interdisciplinary

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visual practice that sits at the intersection of film and photography. The chapter aims to challenge conventional perceptions of still images by considering them as containing movement, and it suggests that photofilm offers a unique opportunity for anthropologists to rethink the use of photographs in their fieldwork.

Essay 5 provides a compelling examination of the boundaries of the hyperreal in the context of cinema and anthropology. Here Schneider unpacks the idea that both cinema and anthropology involve constructed realities and analogous processes, challenging the common perception of cinema as an extreme, hyperreal construction of reality. Schneider highlights the shared pursuit of truth values and verisimilar representations in both ethnography and cinema. Essay 6 focuses on the concept of participatory cinema through Cine Con Vecinos (CCV), a small group in Argentina, as a method of cinematic film production that foregrounds agency, participation, and social relations. Although not documentaries, the films would be grounded in real-life experiences, shot in local areas, and use locals as actors. Essay 7 uses the work of Cyrill Lachauer, a German filmmaker and anthropologist, as a case study to explore the intersection of art and ethnography, a concept referred to as 'art-ethnography' (144). Cyrill Lachauer's films serve as a focal point for examining the fusion of artistic expression and anthropological research. Lastly, Chapter 8 touches upon the idea of using film as a means of restitution, particularly in the context of representing marginalized cultures and objects in museums. It introduces the concept of using experimental film as an analogue to initiate a discourse surrounding this challenging topic.

The most interesting essay is Essay 3. Schneider explores the concept of experimental film as a material object rather than just an experience of time. This perspective highlights the use of experimental time and optical effects, such as flickers, as well as the incorporation of multiple viewpoints projected on the screen to create a unique viewer experience. These experimental techniques aim to engage the audience in a different way than traditional narrative cinema. Schneider draws a key distinction between feature films and experimental films. Feature films typically follow a narrative structure with a clear subject, while experimental films reject this narrative convention. Experimental films are more concerned with the impact they have on the viewer, focusing on the experience they create rather than on conforming to the idea that the exterior world should match its representation. Here is it unclear and uncompelling why experimental films are the preferred cinematic medium to complement anthropological inquiries. Indeed, anthropology, including anthropological film, traditionally (but not exclusively) aims to capture the human experience, while experimental film can often be more cerebral and abstract, potentially lacking a direct focus on human experiences. There is little evidence to suggest that his participants are interested in experimental film and whether that is how they wish their experience(s) to be depicted. In this way, Schneider runs the risk of reinforcing the very power dichotomy he seeks to abolish.

Overall, this collection of essays is an important contribution to the field of anthropology, film and visual studies. Schneider ambitiously considers the complex relationship between the moving image and anthropology, highlighting the potential for innovative approaches, experimental methods, and expanded perspectives in both fields. It encourages readers to think critically about how films and visual media can contribute to anthropological research and representation.

CAROL V. MCKINNEY. *BARANZAN'S PEOPLE: AN ETHNOHISTORY OF THE BAJJU OF THE MIDDLE BELT OF NIGERIA.* DALLAS: SIL INTERNATIONAL 2019. 265 P. ISBN: 9781556713996

KEFAS LAMAK[1]

Carol McKinney presents a study of the origin, history, culture, and religious beliefs and practices of the Bajju people of Southern Kaduna, formerly known as Southern Zaria (in what is sometimes called the Middle Belt of Nigeria). Through an anthropological study of the Bajju people, McKinney gives a comprehensive history, from precolonial to colonial and post-colonial periods (xvii). In the beginning of her book, McKinney acknowledges that the Bajju people are a minority ethnic group in Nigeria with a population of four hundred and eighty to one million and are considered to be among the largest ethnic groups in the modern-day Kaduna state (9). Situating the Bajju people in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, McKinney compares them throughout the book with many other ethnic groups in the area to show where they share a common identity, history, and religion (4-5). This helps give a broader perspective on the peoples of the Middle Belt.

McKinney's work adds to knowledge regarding the origin of the Bajju people who migrated to modern-day Southern Kaduna from Plateau State (5; 19). Perhaps not too many people in the Middle Belt, even among Bajju ethnic group, are familiar with the history of their forefathers among the Jarawa and Miago people of Plateau State. Baranzan, identified as the first father of the Bajju ethnic group, first moved from Jarawa-occupied territories of the Northern Jos Plateau and settled in the Miango area. At this point Bajju people shared the land and a culture with the Afizere people. Baranzan then decided to move from Kwoll Miango because of famine and settled in the location that the Bajju people currently occupy in Kaduna (19-21). Baranzan later had five children who then moved to other areas to form villages and towns within Southern Kaduna (21). This is very significant in studying culture in the Middle Belt and Northern Nigeria. However, McKinney is not precise about when these historic migrations happened, leaving room for archeologists and other historians to continue this research.

McKinney's work also continues the political history of the Bajju people from their precolonial past to the colonial occupation of Nigeria and post-colonial times (166-167). She notes that the Bajju people were enslaved for a long time by the Muslims of Zazzau, from Shehu Usman Dan-Fodio's Islamic jihad (1804) to the arrival of colonialists (166). At the arrival of British colonialists and the annexation of Northern Nigeria, the colonialists sided with the Hausa Fululani Muslims to indirectly rule the Bajju people. McKinney cites the work of Moses Ochonu in what he calls 'colonialism by proxy' (168). What is new in McKinney's argument about Bajju politics

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and their oppression by both colonialists and Hausa Fulani Muslims is her discussion of their various attempts and struggles to have a leadership structure independent of traditional rulers from the Zaria emirate and Sokoto Caliphate.

When they approached the British colonialists asking to be granted independence, the British said that unless they had the approval of the emirate of Zaria, they would not grant them their independent chiefdoms. Therefore, they would continue to be answerable to the Sarkin Jama'a, the Hausa Muslim representative of the Zaria emirate (170). Through their elders, the Bajju people sent numerous delegations to the emir of Zaria from the 1930s to the 1960s to seek their approval for traditional independent leadership, to no avail. Instead, this play for independence ended in the persecution of the delegates of the Bajju people by the emir of Zaria. McKinney notes that the Bajju people had their first traditional chief in 1996 during the military rule of General Sani Abacha, under whose government they were also allowed to create multiple chiefdoms (195).

Examining the religious history and evolution of the Bajju people, McKinney shows that Christianity arrived through the Sudan Interior Missions (SIM) missionaries in 1929 (174). Before the coming of Christianity, most Bajju people practiced their forefathers' ancestral religions with strong beliefs in God, spirits, witches, reincarnation, medicines, traditional healers and charms. Today 95% of the Bajju ethnic group are Christians (175). McKinney raises a new argument about early missionary encounters in Bajju land and many parts of the Middle Belt. On her account the usage of Hausa as the language of worship in church led the people to speak more Hausa (176-178). She observes that missionaries could not keep up with translating the Bible for every ethnic group in the Middle Belt and Nothern Nigeria, leading them to decide to use the Hausa Bible translation (176-178). As a result, most churches in Bajju territories today use Hausa or English.

Finally, McKinney argues that there have been numerous social changes among the Bajju people. Through missionaries and their religious encounters, most Bajju people worldwide now are Christians, and they no longer practice the ancestral religion of their forefather, Baranzan (99). The arrival of colonialists ended the Bajju people's hostilities with the Muslims of Zaria, though from 1980 to 2000 there were a series of religious crises in which the ethnic group was involved, as well as many other ethnic groups living in Kaduna from all over the country (183; 202-203). Finally, McKinney notes the Bajju people are committed to going to school and searching for a better life, causing their young people to migrate all round Nigeria (198).

I admire McKinney's scholarship and her engagement with the of the culture, religion, and migration of the Bajju people with a deep mastery of their language and history. The book is based on archival sources found in the National Kaduna Archives and on fieldwork among the Bajju people. This book can be used in programs within the Humanities and anthropology in particular to understand the religion and culture of the people of the Middle Belt in Nigeria.

LUIZ BOLOGNESI. *THE LAST FOREST.* SANTA MONICA: LAEMMLE MONICA FILM CENTER 2021. 76 MINUTES, COLOUR.

MARIA MURAD[1]

The last forest, directed by Brazilian filmmaker Luiz Bolognesi, tells the story of the Yanomami people who inhabit territory at the border of Brazil and Venezuela in the Amazon Forest. They have lived here for over a millennium, long before these two countries existed. Following the discovery of gold in the area in the 1980s, gold miners brought weapons, violence, and disease to the region. This film shares a story of resistance as Davi Kopenawa, co-screenwriter and leader of the Yanomami, fights for the preservation of his community against encroaching gold prospectors. The entire film is in the Yanomami language with no embedded subtitles (excluding the title cards). This is one of the very few ethnographic films streaming on Netflix in the United Kingdom, and, using their subtitle feature, one can have the film translated to almost any language.

At its core, this is a story about protecting the forest from gold prospectors, with Bolognesi placing the environment at the centre of the film through wide shots of the Amazon Forest. The first few scenes focus on food and subsistence practices. We see hunting in the forest, butchering at home, and collecting in the river. These scenes are interrupted by a speech Kopenawa gives to the Yanomami. He explains how he must leave for a while to educate white people on Yanomami culture with the hopes of protecting it. He finishes his speech by saying, 'We are the children of Omama, the last children of the forest, we must fight so that our children grow up healthy…'

Throughout the film we see moments of Yanomami resistance, but also times when white culture seeps into the community. In one scene, white miners with shotguns try to enter the forest, but they are met with several Yanomami men armed with spears, bows, and arrows, ready to defend their territory. Kopenawa says, 'If we don't protect ourselves, after they find gold, they'll come by the thousands'. Later, Kopenawa is talking on the radio, warning others of 10,000 gold prospectors approaching. One Yanomami man is tempted by his brother-in-law to join them. Kopenawa tries to convince this individual that the Yanomami are inconsequential to the gold prospectors' agenda. The film also features the story of a woman whose husband never returns home from hunting. She pleads with Kopenawa and other shamans to help bring him back, and they perform a ceremony for his return. The movie ends with her husband still missing. She decides to start a women's association to weave and sell baskets to white people so that Yanomami women can be economically independent without their husbands.

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A stand-out element of this film is the blending of documentary and fiction. For example, it features fictionalised scenes where members of the Yanomami community act out their origin story. Bolognesi says in an interview that while living with the community for two weeks, the Yanomami insisted on telling the story of brothers Omama and Yoasi on their own terms. Kopenawa narrates: Omama dug a hole through the forest and water accumulated into rivers and lakes. He and his brother, Yaosi, grew lonely and tried to birth a woman. Yaosi copulated with his own leg but gave birth to a boy. Later, Omama found Thuëyoma, a woman who emerged from the underwater forest. Yaosi has intercourse with her but harmed her with his misshapen penis. In the end, Omama married Thuëyoma and they became the progenitors and protectors of the Yanomami people. Yoasi was expelled to the other side of the great ocean river where he created death. Omama buried the evil spirits and disease along with the ores underground.

The film cuts back and forth between Yanomami community members who are acting out their origin story for the film, and Kopenawa, who sits in a circle while men and women make spears and weave baskets around him. I found this part of the film to be the most important because it highlights many themes of the film, the Yanomami way of life, and shows the Yanomami's agency in telling their origin story. The interspersed cuts between present day and the Yanomami's origin story combine the old and the new, crossing time and space, and shows the continued relevance of their history. This story also provides context for why the Yanomami so fervently fight off gold prospectors. When prospectors mine ores, they unleash both the disease and evil spirits that Omama initially buried underground. Though an origin story can seem distant, acting out this story in the film makes it tangible for an outside audience. The film's final scenes show Kopenawa at Harvard University, educating students about the threat of gold miners to the Yanomami people and the harm of city commercialism to the Amazon Forest. This scene is once again interspersed with bird's-eye drone shots of the forest, visually signifying the forest's importance in the film. The film ends with title cards explaining how in 2019 the Brazilian government stopped enforcing restrictions on mining in the forest. This created several problems for the Yanomami community, including mercury poisoning and the spread of COVID-19. These cards also say that Kopenawa has been receiving death threats for pushing back against mining.

Bolognesi, along with Kopenawa and the collaborators in the Yanomami community, set out to create a film which shares a story of continued indigenous resistance against the threat of profit-driven gold mining. The most unique parts of the film are the fictionalized scenes integrated into the larger documentary format which share the origin story of the Yanomami and explain the threat of gold mining within the community. The film itself is an act of resistance, continuing Kopenawa's mission of educating white audiences about his community, their way of life, and how the Yanomami resist encroaching gold miners.

ROBERT O'MOCHAIN AND YUKI UENO. *SEXUAL ABUSE AND EDUCATION IN JAPAN: IN THE (INTER) NATIONAL SHADOWS.* ABINGDON: ROUTLEDGE 2022. 222 P. ISBN: 9781032310237

PEYTON CHERRY[1]

In an investigation into the Japanese debate around 'comfort women', Robert O'Mochain and Yuki Ueno craft the perfect primer for contemporary discussions around multiple issues of sexual violence, feminist movements, and sexuality education. *Sexual abuse and education in Japan: in the (inter) national shadows* is a volume published in September 2022 which covers a broad swath of Japan's historical and current anxieties around gender, sexuality, and the power dynamics which emerge from gendered social structures. Both authors bring to the table a wealth of experience in disciplines of international relations, language, literature, and gender studies.

This interdisciplinary background produces a book which is approachable for non-Japan specialists and audiences interested in any of the issues discussed within. O'Mochain has been researching and publishing on the topics of masculinity, sexual harassment, and sexual violence in Japan for over a decade. He has often focused on educational contexts which is reflected in multiple sections of this volume. Ueno has written primarily on language and gender, including about the sexualisation of Japanese schoolgirls' uniforms.

O'Mochain and Ueno set out the thematic framework of their key term: 'international status anxiety', a preoccupation with 'defending and enhancing a state's global image', to dissect Japanese political factions' denial of responsibility and reluctance to provide repatriations for sexual crimes during wartime (8). Examples and arguments always connect back to historical precedents of sexual violence, male-dominated political action, and Japanese society's continued silencing and demeaning of women. Three sections define this volume: (1) an overview of sexual abuse and education in Japan, (2) a psychosocial analysis of sexual abuse seeking to explain its prevalence, and (3) a 'reflection and solution' section aptly titled 'Beyond the #MeToo model'.

First, O'Mochain and Ueno provide background on the development of different masculinities in Japan, introducing hard faction masculinity (*kōha*) and soft faction masculinity (*nanpa*). These terms become vital to later examples of how Meiji era (1868-1912) masculinity fed into modern political conservatism. The authors also make sure to introduce the conversation around *shōshika*, or declining birthrate, which is an ongoing demographic concern in aging Japan. The section also outlines sexual harassment, #MeToo related campaigns, and the lack of legal protection for women and LGBTQ individuals in Japan.

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In the second chapter of part one, sexual abuse is explained in an educational context, and it is the first – and only – time transcribed interviews are used. It includes an interview with a student named 'Rina' who details her experiences of sexual assault by a university English-language instructor she trusted. Although these accounts powerfully demonstrate the pervasive issue of sexual abuse in Japanese schools, it is odd because both 'Rina' and 'Song' (a male student and victim of sexual assault) are not mentioned again until the very end of the book. Their accounts support the authors' stance that victims are aware of the social pressures which prevent them from 'voicing up' and finding support after such incidents. However, they are a jarring addition to a volume which otherwise relies on secondhand data from news sources and previously published research.

For their conclusion, O'Mochain and Ueno bring together the case studies from the rest of the book. They use these to consider how policy changes, social movements, and campaigns like #MeToo may transform Japanese society in the future. They set forth the positioning of Japan as a 'Capitalist Development State' which glorifies aggression and crafts a society where women are especially vulnerable to exploitation. In this final chapter, the authors seek to answer the question 'why and how do men in Japan sexualize power?' (164). It comes down to a large-scale lack of protection, education, and support for vulnerable populations, including children, youth, and women who are victims of sexual violence.

The resistance against change in existing legislation comes primarily from political conservatives, including far-right nationalist groups. There is denial of a need to apologise not just for the crimes against 'comfort women' but against Japanese and foreign women today, taking such stances as 'sexually promiscuous women are the ones who should be saying sorry' (166). The lack of accountability and progressive legal change in Japan when it comes to sexual crimes is difficult to fight when NPOs struggle to become established and school textbooks modify or erase historical accounts of sexual violence. One of the primary concerns for NPOs and committees in Japan is to improve environments and reduce sexual and gender harassment in school and workplaces.

The authors end on the note that feminist groups in Japan may need to turn away from the individual focus #MeToo campaigns have in the West, especially because it does little to pierce 'ultra-nationalist, political elite groupings in Japanese society' (195). They suggest collaboration between Japan and South Korea to deal with the 'comfort women' issue and address their respective societies' sexual abuse issues. The calls for action are ones which are familiar, asking for raised voices and victims coming out of the shadows. But, as Ueno mentioned, this would require change as early as childhood, raising sons and daughters to have different conceptions of femininity and masculinity. And, of course, the burden cannot fall solely on parents or victims of sexual abuse. Eventually, it must work its way up into educational systems and political circles. The message here is clear: gradual change is occurring, but we have a long way to go.

Notably, the emphasis of this book is not on ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, or even people of mixed nationalities living in Japan. Instead, O'Mochain and Ueno focus more generally on how traditional constructions of masculinity and femininity impact Japanese fields of politics, education, and other public spaces. From their discussion on the relations Japan has with neighbouring nations like China and South Korea, should emerge more in-depth examinations of the impact this has on the perceived 'Other'—non-ethnically Japanese or indigenous Japanese groups like the Ainu, within Japanese society.

This book connects cultural attitudes and social norms established in both Meiji era and post-World War II era Japan to inequalities faced by Japanese society today. *Sexual abuse and education in Japan: in the (inter) national shadows* is not a work derived from ethnographic material and, although qualitative interview and survey data is used – particularly around experiences of sexual harassment – it lacks thick description and additional context on the individuals mentioned. Researchers already specialising on sexual abuse in Japan will find the contents a useful review rather than containing any revelations.

FRANCESCA SOBANDE AND LAYLA-ROXANNE HILL. *BLACK OOT HERE: BLACK LIVES IN SCOTLAND.* LONDON: BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC 2022. 248 P. ISBN: 9781913441333

RIYA GOSRANI[1]

In *Black oot here*, Francesca Sobande and Layla-Roxanne Hill provide a reflective account of Black people living in contemporary Scotland. Dominant throughout the book is the reconsideration of historically positivist epistemes which dehumanise Black lives through quantitative methods. Refusing to reinforce such techniques, the authors nominate diverse approaches to meaningfully engage with heterogeneous lived experiences of racism, nationhood and identity. Thus, their methodological approaches encompass an eclectic mixture of intergenerational ethnographic interviews, surveys, and analyses of photographs, media, and archived materials.

Following the introduction, chapter two attempts to fill the lacunae in Black Scottish history teachings across institutional settings. After situating the country's significant involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, attention is drawn to the momentous yet sparsely recognised practices in which Scotland remains an active agent of ongoing settler colonialism. In a similar vein, throughout this chapter is the notion of 'Scottish exceptionalism', whereby Scotland is often erroneously portrayed as an anti-racist utopia that is ideologically separate from England. Transcending this narrative, Sobande and Hill delve into the racialised origins of capitalism which permeate and inherently oppress Black people and migrants in present-day Scottish workspaces, in what might be described as the 'neoliberal aesthetic' of black representations (102). The authors postulate that the 'progress' and 'inclusion' of migrants is often masked by the very fact that their value is often tied to their worthiness in terms of economic value.

Chapter three further extends this critical lens, as the authors question the notion of 'New Scots', or the term alluding to Scotland's welcoming of refugees and asylum seekers. This book enables one to understand the disjunctions that arise when the lived realities of racialised minorities in Scotland are concealed under this novel terminology, whereby unrealistic visions of 'New Scots' are reified via elite discourses. Sobande and Hill helpfully extend their analysis to that of semantics and temporality. In considering how 'New Scots' become 'Old Scots', the reader may consider the racial politics which enable identities to transpire through these designated labels. This movement demonstrates the need for reflexivity when considering policies, to ensure that efforts are actively anti-racist, going beyond passive aestheticism. The authors engage in these very practices when writing the book by representationally drawing upon first-hand lived realities of Black people in Scotland

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rather than dominant discourses, which are predominantly reliant on terms used by non-Black individuals to delineate their experiences.

Chapter four culminates in a discussion surrounding depictions of Black people on public platforms, such as media outlets in Scotland. The analytical trajectory is continued by extending visions beyond the seemingly positive increases in the representation of Black people in recent years. Instead, Sobande and Hill shed light on the novel marketing culture, impinging on and becoming synonymous with activism. In this way, readers can depict how profit-making branding techniques are disguised under the rubric of Black representation. This framework is valuable in recognising that lasting structural changes related to racism must extend beyond the reductionistic increases in inclusion of Black lives in Scottish media. The authors make a compelling argument by problematising the nature of black politics, which similarly attempt to capitalise on the inclusion of Black people. Their analysis familiarly draws caution to celebrating the inclusion of Black women in the Scottish parliament. The sense of relief by political parties towards this fact is a testament to the tickbox activity that relies on maintaining a certain image. Thus, an important point is raised in which further discussions about Black representation are ironically limited due to inclusionary policies being tokenistic in their very nature.

Black oot here is a meaningful contribution to Black Feminist literature which outlines the permeation of Black Scottish history into present-day lived realities. Scholars of these issues might find this book valuable yet haphazard, due to the meandering musings, photographs, and an abundance of ethnographic monologues. However, this unconventional academic structure is a testament to the very essence of the population under study. Namely, Black lives cannot simply be forced into historically conventional narratives, within which their stories have been insufficiently accounted for or even untold. Therefore, whilst this book is admittedly hard to follow at times, much insight is gained from the diverse range of voices heard, accompanied with a humbling reflexive recognition of its own limitations. Throughout the book, the authors recognise the persistent omission of the most marginalised Black lives, who continue to lack a voice and are unable to participate in academic spaces. Ultimately, Sobande and Hill's refusal to quantify lived experiences amalgamates in a powerful and thought-provoking text.

NOBUHIRO KISHIGAMI (ED.) *WORLD WHALING: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY STUDIES.* OSAKA: NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY [SENRI ETHNOGOLOGICAL SERIES 104] 2021. 358 P. ISBN: 978-4-906962-87-7

RÓISÍN KENNELLY[1]

World whaling is a 2021 volume of multidisciplinary papers edited by the Japanese National Museum of Ethnology's Nobuhiro Kishigami. The volume aims to provide up-to-date information on whaling across the world; promote a multidisciplinary perspective by combining fields such as anthropology, international relations, philosophy, ethics, geographic studies, and veterinary fields; illustrate the global scale of issues affecting whaling; and demonstrate the complex interactions between human and non-human actors. With a varied collection of papers, this volume successfully achieves these goals and provides a wide-ranging discussion of the state of world whaling.

Kishigami introduces the volume with an overview of world whaling history and practices, and a review of studies on whales and whaling. He engages with several specific cases of whaling and expertly provides foundational knowledge for any readers unfamiliar with the topic. The volume is then split in four distinct sections, each featuring papers from a variety of disciplines. In Part 1, the volume focusses on historical and contemporary perspectives on commercial whaling. Hamaguchi provides an overview of governmental decision-making regarding commercial whaling in Icelandic waters, approaching the topic from a historical perspective and demonstrating the contours of extremes experienced in this industry, from hunting booms to hunting bans. Akamine offers an analysis of coastal minke whaling in Norway, providing an overview of whaling in the region and detailing the social costs of the industry. As one of only three commercially whaling nations, the absence of insight into the Japanese commercial whaling industry is very stark here, despite the attention it receives in the rest of the volume.

The papers in Part 2 focus on indigenous and local whaling practices in specific regions. Zdor provides a fascinating account of subsistence whaling practices of the Chukotkan indigenous people, highlighting changes made since the 19th century to the social organisation of whaling communities, the adoption of technologies, and ceremonies and rituals. Next, Kishigami's discussion of the socio-cultural significance of bowhead whale hunts for Inupiat in Utiqiagvik, Alaska, engages with vital discussions of food security and sovereignty. Honda's article on Greenlandic indigenous whaling details a brief history before exploring an account of modern-day whaling practices and the steep decline of associated hunting rituals and superstitions. Fielding provides an expansive description of the Faroese drive-based pilot whaling known as the *grindadráp*. His discussion of contemporary issues such as international

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backlash and interference from NGOs, environmental pollutants and mercury levels limiting consumption paints a strong picture of a cultural institution under threat through environmental catastrophe. Kawashima's paper also discusses the *grindadráp*, though he focusses more closely on its history, the distribution of whale meat in the community, and conflicts between locals and anti-whaling groups in the 2010s, before drawing comparisons with drive-based whale-hunting in Taiji, Japan. Finally, Sun-ae Ii utilises the life histories of people associated with the commercial whaling industry during the 20th century in Jangsaengpo, Korea, to examine historical changes, economic fluctuations and the rise of anti-whaling sentiment that led to its cessation in the 1980s.

Part 3 brings together themes of politics, media, image-making, and changing public discourses. Wakamatsu's paper explores layers of misdirection, politics, truth, and tackles the (re)construction of commercial whaling in Japan through scientific research and cetology. Ikuta details an arduous political fight that the Inupiat and Yupiit of Alaska brought to the IWC in 2018, securing a landmark victory for their hunting rights, bringing into question how regulatory bodies often place unnecessary labour on indigenous people. Takahashi engages with narratives of environmentalism and human-animal relations in the political decisions of the European Union, exploring the convoluted landscapes created by complicated decision-making, and questioning its impacts on human-whale relations. Kawashima explores the power of media to shape public opinion of whales and considers that significant changes in public perception in the last 50 years were influenced by documentaries and media with anti-whaling messaging. Finally, Usada critically engages with the construction of specific pro-Japanese-whaling discourse and demonstrates the role of government agencies, anthropologists, and whaling communities in the creation and dissemination of this discourse.

Finally, Part 4 concludes the volume with an exploration of ethics and animal welfare. Ole Oen's paper discusses research and development improvements in humane hunting techniques alongside ethical and environmental debates. Harfield engages with philosophical and ethical debates in whaling, emphasising the disparity between public and academic debates and demonstrating the necessity of separating animal welfare, animal ethics, and environmental ethics in ongoing discourse. Finally, Iseda discusses this history, the development of Japanese human-animal relations, and the ethics of hunting and killing animals, considering the differences between Japanese and western ideologies of hunting.

For me, the volume's biggest success is its treatment of the leviathan. There are two leviathans here: the whale and the International Whaling Coalition (IWC), which looms with an ever-watchful eye, casting its influence on all realms of whaling practices. The volume does a fabulous job of demonstrating said influence, for better or worse, and highlighting issues associated with international regulatory bodies, including political infighting and the adherence to a moral absolutism that overlooks the nuance of a global practice. Further, by bringing together multiple disciplines, Kishigami was able to delve deeper into themes not often discussed in whaling discourse and it is refreshing to read a volume which steps outside of ethical and moral debates to include alternative impacts, especially environmental and political ramifications.

On the other hand, there are several elements that are less enjoyable. Firstly, the papers could feel repetitive at times with information consistently repeated, especially that concerning the IWC. Secondly, there are several missed opportunities. Despite some limited discussion, the impacts of climate change and environmental pollution are oddly absent from the wider volume, despite being a major issue in the future of whaling. Furthermore, I found that the papers in this volume failed to engage with the wider ramifications of these issues, leaving the reader with a sense of isolation from each stand-alone paper. While there are brief glimpses of connections in Zdor and Kawashima's papers, the volume holistically features little discussion of connections between whaling communities beyond the IWC. Considering the

migratory nature of whales themselves, the volume would have benefited from engaging more with the movements and migrations of techniques, beliefs, and equipment across the oceans that connect all whaling communities.

Overall, the volume provides a strong overview of whaling and delivers a significant foundation of engagement with the many issues facing the practice. It is accessible to non-experts, easy to read, and demonstrates multi-disciplinary engagement with global issues. Kishigami aimed to create a volume which encapsulated whaling in its modern form and has successfully curated a collection which shows a breadth of themes and arguments. The volume is sure to generate further research into whaling and is an excellent starting point for anyone interested in gaining further knowledge of this complex global practice.

JEREMY ADLER AND RICHARD FARDON. *FRANZ BAERMANN STEINER: A STRANGER IN THE WORLD.* LONDON AND NEW YORK: BERGHAHN 2021. 290 P. ISBN: 9781800732704

SHANNON LIN[1]

A stranger in the world is a befitting subtitle to Jeremy Adler and Richard Fardon's biography of Franz Baermann Steiner, a polymath known for his poetic and academic work in the fields of anthropology and politics, as well as his role as quiet contemporary to the founding figures of social anthropology. Adler and Fardon describe Steiner through his periods of influence and writing, beginning from Steiner's childhood in Karlín, Prague to his final days at Oxford. Steiner's specific alchemy of experience was one of intellectual luminance, perpetual tragedy, and displacement. Steiner's exile in the United Kingdom profoundly influenced his academic and philosophical outlook, fueling his interest in questions of identity, language, culture, and the human condition in a world besieged by political turmoil and ideological conflict. The authors paint a true-to-life portrait of Steiner as an enigmatic figure whose scholarly and literary pursuits served as a conduit between European thought and Oxford anthropology; his greater life thesis was the quest for tolerance and freedom. The authors do not seek to present a cold archaeology of Steiner's life through a dissection of his writings, rather Adler and Fardon convince the reader of Steiner's undeniable humanity by balancing analysis of the man alongside his written works.

Steiner was as touched and changed by *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moby Dick* as he was by his travels, the devastation of the Second World War, and the guilt of surviving in isolation. Steiner had no single formative age but many formative experiences, each of which the authors identify as 'patterns' that would recur and sculpt his praxis. Steiner's Judaism was a major theme of patterning; he saw his family's establishment in Prague as a specific result of the fraught history of European Jewry, and himself as a member of a people defined by their serial alienation. From youth Steiner sought ways to understand the forces that govern such divisive categorisation as well as the perspectives behind cultural cohesion and exclusion: this would naturally lead to his navigation of the world through anthropology.

In the chapter regarding Steiner's first ethnological studies of Ruthenian Gypsies, Adler and Fardon reveal Steiner to be a highly empathetic and prescient spirit who, almost a century ago, shared the ethos of contemporary anthropologists: the production of knowledge for purposes of mutual benefit, described by the authors as co-modernisation and simultaneous enfranchisement. Steiner saw himself in the situation of the Ruthenian Gypsies, who were 'an

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Oriental people living among Westerners' (59) and whose connection to mainstream communities was only through market activities. Just as his subjects of study were geographically and socially peripheral, Steiner was a constant stranger, both in his being an anthropologist before a community of study, as well in his isolation from his family and homeland as a Jew in exile. Penance and suffering dominated his thought, and Steiner sought clarity through intellectual dialogue. He saw suffering as 'the medium of time' (243) which provided the foundation of value. Religions, in turn, are social institutions created to communicate such suffering (244). Counter to the lineage of Western thought, Steiner was drawn into philosophical debate with Nietzsche and Rilke and argued that suffering was the weft of humanity; that suffering is what makes man truly human.

At the end of the book, readers will come to know Steiner as the great predecessor as well as Steiner the fellow student, friend, poet, and human being. Local readers will easily find kinship with Steiner's lament over the overly expensive books of Oxford, the cursed English weather, and the loneliness of writing. Steiner's belief in the benefaction of tolerance and pluralism is urgent in the contemporary, and is proven by his anthropology: though society has strong classifications, it holds danger – intolerance – at bay by respecting both the commonalities of our many cultures, as well as its differences. Steiner's thought occupied a critical juncture between anthropology, political activism, and poetry that is as close to an ideal model of interdisciplinarity than anything that currently exists. This is an essential reading for anthropologists and members of all social science disciplines, as well as students needing grounding in these uncertain times.