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EDITORIAL

Tereza Kuldova

Extreme Masculinities 2 is the second special issue that emerged out of the international conference Extreme Masculinities, which I have organized on behalf of the Extreme Anthropology Research Network (www.extreme-anthropology.com) at the University of Vienna between 28th September and 1st October 2017.

In this issue, you will find a range of articles on exciting and thought-provoking topics. First, Japhy Wilson draws us into the world of Jeffrey Sachs' problematic developmental projects in Uganda, offering us a chapter from his book Jeffrey Sachs: The Strange Case of Dr. Shock and Mr. Aid that has been censored by Verso for fear of legal troubles; we reproduce here the previously unpublished chapter in full, including a new preface and postscript that reflects on the nature of extreme fieldwork, for which Japhy Wilson also received the Extreme Anthropology Award in 2017. Marco Palillo draws us into the disturbing lifeworlds of male asylum seekers in Sicily, interrogating the ways in which they narrate both their refugeeness and their masculinity. Charlie Athill provides a fresh view on the much demonised urban figure of the hipster, analyzing the accusations of pretentiousness and lack of authenticity levied against hipsters, while offering a potential line of defense. Daniel Briggs offers a personal account and a reflection on doing extreme ethnography and covert fieldwork in a luxury brother in Madrid, showing us the precariousness of life under socio-economic and commercial bondage. Duncan Williams analyzes the figure of Stagger Lee and considers how and why this paean to violence, with its fetishistic vision of extreme masculinity, became a standard in the American folk canon. Arne Røkkum responds in his commentary piece to an article by Henrik H. Mikkelsen on headhunting, or 'facehunting', in the Phillipines, published in the previous special issue of this journal, thus offering us a further in-depth look into the ways in which cultural techniques embellish violence. Additionally, the reader will find two book reviews of Masculinities under Neoliberalism (eds. Cornwall, Andrea, Karioris, Frank G. and Lindisfarne, Nancy; London: ZED Books, 2016) and of Man or Monster? The Trial of Khmer Rouge Torturer (Alexander Laban Hinton, Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016), in this volume. Thank you for reading and for your support of this journal.

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Article

Sabotage of Development

Subverting the Censorship of Renegade Research

Japhy Wilson
The University of Manchester

Abstract In 2014, a prominent radical publishing house released a book about the influential development economist Jeffrey Sachs. The published version was one chapter shorter than the final proofs. This chapter had been removed after the publisher sought legal advice on content pertaining to fieldwork conducted in Uganda on Sachs's Millennium Villages Project (MVP), an international development programme financed by some of the wealthiest individuals and most powerful corporations in the world. In contrast to the MVP's extravagant claims of success, the censored chapter documented allegations of mismanagement and corruption, and told the story of the author's detention, his pursuit by secret police on suspicion of 'sabotage of development', and subsequent threats of legal action made against him by Sachs's philanthropic foundation. This article reproduces the censored chapter in its entirety, as an example of the stakes involved in transgressing 'ethical research' protocols that function to shield power from scrutiny. The chapter is prefaced with a discussion of the MVP and the state-capital-academia nexus, and is followed by a postscript, which sets out the principles of 'renegade research'.

Keywords research ethics, capital-state-academia nexus, politics of development, Millennium Villages Project, critical research methods, renegade research

Preface

In 2014, Verso published a book of mine about the influential development economist Jeffrey Sachs (Wilson 2014a). The published version, however, was one chapter shorter than the final proofs. The majority of Chapter Six, entitled 'Sabotage of Development', had been removed at the last minute at Verso's insistence, after the publisher sought legal advice on content pertaining to my fieldwork in Uganda, where I had conducted research on Sachs's Millennium Villages Project (MVP). The MVP was a high-profile international development project, with the public support and financial backing of some of the wealthiest individuals and corporations in the world. In contrast to Sachs's extravagant pronouncements of the MVP's success, the censored chapter describes the profound dysfunction and widespread allegations of corruption that I discovered in the Millennium Village in Uganda. It also tells the story of my subsequent detention by local police, my pursuit by the Ugandan secret police on suspicion of sabotage, and threats of legal action made by Sachs's philanthropic foundation, which ultimately succeeded in supressing the story. At least until now.

This article reproduces the censored chapter in its entirety, as an example of the stakes involved in transgressing the 'ethical research protocols' that function to shield power from scrutiny, and as contribution to this journal's exploration of 'extreme' situations

and practices.¹ This preface to the chapter provides some context on the MVP and the capital-state-academia nexus, and outlines the unusual circumstances of my fieldwork. The chapter is followed by a postscript on the anti-method of 'renegade research'.

The Millennium Villages Project was launched in 2006 by Jeffrey Sachs, the notorious architect of neoliberal shock therapy in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and most catastrophically Russia. In my book on Sachs, I interpret the MVP as the staging of a fantasy of harmonious capitalist development far removed from the Real of Capital the vortex of economic collapse, social disintegration, and venal corruption unleashed by his Russia experiment. In contrast to the brutality of shock therapy, the MVP aimed to demonstrate Sachs's solution to extreme poverty in a series of model villages across sub-Saharan Africa, through the transformation of 'sub-subsistence farmers' into 'smallscale entrepreneurs' (Sanchez et al 2009, 40). As such, it was central to his own remarkable transformation from the dastardly 'Dr Shock' into the magnanimous 'Mr Aid'. The project was financed by Millennium Promise – a philanthropic foundation created by Sachs, and funded by multi-million-dollar donations from the likes of George Soros, Tommy Hilfiger, Madonna, and a host of hedge fund managers and multinational corporations including Facebook, General Electric, GlaxoSmithKline, Goldman Sachs, KPMG, Merck, Monsanto, Nike, Novartis, PepsiCo, Pfizer, Sony and Unilever (Millennium Villages Project 2011, 36). For these idividuals and companies, as for Sachs himself, the MVP offered an opportunity to burnish their egos and sanitize their images by playing a role in nothing less than 'the end of poverty' (Sachs 2005).

The MVP was implemented in 12 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. I chose to focus my field research on the Millennium Village of Ruhiira, Uganda, which had been described by Sachs as the 'flagship' Millennium Village (quoted in Divon and Bergstrom 2012, 88). According to the MVP, by 2010 maize yields in Ruhiira had increased from 1.8 to 3.9 tons per hectare, the proportion of children receiving free school meals had increased by 69 per cent, malaria prevalence was approaching zero, and the proportion of households with 'access to improved drinking water' had almost quadrupled (Millennium Villages Project 2010, 63). These dramatic claims of success led to Ruhiira being selected as the symbolic location of Tommy Hilfiger's 'Promise Collection' – a charity fashion line launched in 2012, the proceeds of which were donated to Millennium Promise. The picturesque mud-hut poverty of Ruhiira served as an emotive backdrop for the promotion of the good deeds of the company, which was mired in controversy at the time, after being implicated in the deaths of twenty-nine workers in a fire in a garment factory in Bangladesh in 2011 (Ross *et al* 2012).

Having selected my research site, I began the task of gaining ethical approval for my research. It quickly became clear that this would be impossible. Approval from the Research Ethics Committee of my university would require approval from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology, which would in turn require approval from the Millennium Villages Project itself. Such approval was conditional on the

¹ I would like to thank the journal's editor, Tereza Kuldova, for creating a scholarly space outside the capital-state-academia nexus in which work like this can be published. This article is dedicated to my Ugandan research assistant and 'fixer', who cannot be named. The fieldwork presented in this article was very much a joint effort, and I am unquestionably Robin to his Batman in terms of renegade research!

research being approved by the Institutional Review Board of Columbia University, where Sachs is Director of the Earth Institute at which the MVP was based. According to documentation included in the appendices of a Masters dissertation on Ruhiira from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, the MVP also demanded exclusive access to all research findings for a period 'not usually exceeding a year'; and insisted upon the signing of a 'Confidentiality Statement' including the promise: 'I will only discuss the data with which I am working for purposes related to the work I am assigned by the MVP staff, and I will not discuss or disclose any information related to this data for purposes other than completing my assigned tasks' (quoted in Divon 2009, 235-236). These legal restrictions were combined with extensive control over the research process itself. Access to the MVP was 'granted' by Jeffrey Sachs's wife, and the researcher was 'allocated' a translator and research assistant by the MVP, as well as a 'community facilitator' for focus group discussions and visits to project sites (Divon 2009, ix, 58, 109).

Independent research is obviously impossible under such circumstances. This may help to explain why, prior to my investigations, no such research had been conducted on the MVP, despite its status at the time as one of the most ambitious and widely publicised development projects in the world. The scenario demonstrates the ways in which the interests of neoliberal academia, state power, and private capital are intertwined within the supposedly neutral and objective criteria of ethical research protocols. According to the so-called 'triple helix' model developed in the USA in the 1980s, and subsequently rolled out around the world, the fostering of competitive knowledge economies depends upon the collaboration of business, government and universities in the financing, conduct and application of academic research (Vallas and Kleinman 2008, Zucker et al 2002). In the British university system, the adoption of this model has been accompanied by the application of the private-sector-inspired principles of 'new public management', which has involved the proliferation of ethics review committees (Hammersley 2010). These committees have tended to prioritise 'the reputational protection of their host institution over and above academic freedom and the protection of research subjects' (Hedgecoe 2016, 486), and have been identified as 'the latest in a series of legislative and institutional measures in which the state has... exerted greater control over social science research' (Travers, quoted in Calvey 2008, 907).

Equally, for 'semi-authoritarian regimes' like that of Uganda (Tripp 2010), ethical approval procedures function as a convenient mechanism of political censorship and the surveillance of 'foreign activity' (Shrapel 2015, 33). Indeed, in the case of Uganda, permission for research is conditional upon the approval of the Office of the Prime Minister (Park 2015, 23). Sachs had been a staunch supporter of the Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, prior to the MVP (Wilson 2014, 85-88), and Ruhiira was a flagship project of both the Ugandan government and Millennium Promise, which had a team of New York lawyers ready to prosecute any violation of MVP research protocols that might compromise the Project's dramatic claims of success.

I decided to sidestep this seemingly insurmountable series of obstacles by going to Ruhiira without telling my university, the Ugandan government, or the MVP. At first, this did not appear to be a very promising strategy, given that I would be arriving in a remote village on the border of Tanzania, where I was unlikely to pass unnoticed. But it turned out that Ruhiira was not a village after all, but a loose collection of towns,

hamlets and homesteads scattered across 140 square kilometres of mountainous land. On my arrival, in February 2013, I based myself in a town several kilometres from the project office, and about an hour's drive from the city of Mbarara, where the main Uganda MVP office was located. I found that the project office was deserted, as the administrators preferred to spend their time in the comfort of the city. Rather than reporting my presence to the administration, many local implementers sought me out to provide me with their testimonies, relieved to finally have what they perceived as an opportunity to tell the world the truth about the Project.

With the help of a Ugandan research assistant, I conducted in-depth interviews with thirty-five households throughout Ruhiira, and nine interviews with employees of the MVP and its partners in the Ugandan government, including five health workers, two teachers, a civil engineer, and an agricultural extension officer. Although I was open with my interviewees about the subject and purpose of my research, I did not apply the officially sanctioned procedure for acquiring informed consent, 'which has become a ritualistic research mantra to many in the social sciences' (Calvey 2017, 48). To do so would have required me to produce a form for my informants to sign prior to each interview. This would probably have dissuaded them from speaking to me at all, and would certainly have limited the information that they were willing to provide. This illustrates the censorial function of 'absolute informed consent' in situations in which the research participant is disclosing sensitive information, and 'the researcher is trying to capture... the unofficial view of an organization' (Calvey 2008, 908).

In addition to these interviews, I received testimonies in the form of unsolicited emails and hand-written notes from other employees of the MVP, who had heard that I was in Ruhiira, but who did not dare to speak to me for fear of being reported to the administrations and losing their jobs. After leaving Uganda, I received further written testimonies from two MVP health workers. I also came into possession of a dossier of complaints compiled by a group of former administrative staff of the Project, which they had sent to Millennium Promise in New York. The dossier included contact information for these and other ex-employees, on the basis of which I conducted telephone interviews with four former administrators who had worked in the Project Office in Mbarara, and received a detailed written statement from a fifth.

My research demonstrated that the MVP was not ending extreme poverty in Ruhiira, but was functioning to deepen pre-existing inequalities, with the great majority of project inputs benefitting local elites. These findings are reported in Chapter Five of my book on Jeffrey Sachs. Allegations of corruption within the project, and the circumstances of my own detention and subsequent persecution, were included in the original version of Chapter Six. This chapter was removed from the book, apart from a few less 'controversial' sections, which were incorporated into an expanded version of Chapter Five. What follows is the full, uncensored version of Chapter Six. ²

² The only alterations to the final proofs of the original manuscript are those required to comply with the style guidelines of the *Journal of Extreme Anthropology*.

Chapter Six: Sabotage of Development

The Ruhiira MVP has been described as a 'petri dish in the laboratory of Jeffrey Sachs' (Munk 2007). But this is a strange kind of science. The MVP was established as a 'proof of concept' for Sachs's global solution to extreme poverty (Konecky and Palm 2008, 1). In the natural sciences, 'proof of concept' means 'test of concept'. But Sachs would appear to have taken the expression literally. The objective is to *prove* that his strategy works, rather than to test whether it does or not. From the outset, Sachs has claimed that every village in Africa 'could be rescued, and could achieve the Millennium Development Goals... with *known*, *proven*, *reliable and appropriate* technologies and interventions' (Sachs 2005, 232). Now his reputation depends on being able to demonstrate that the MDGs have indeed been achieved in the Millennium Villages through the application of these 'known' and 'proven' interventions by the end of 2015. As we have seen, the reputations of several billionaires and numerous multinational corporations are also invested in the success of the MVP. There is therefore immense pressure for positive results across the Project as a whole, and particularly in Ruhiira, as the 'flagship' Millennium Village.

This pressure may help to explain the atmosphere of tension under which the implementers of the MVP are forced to operate. One person who worked closely with the MVP in Ruhiira told me that its employees 'are motivated by stress and fear ... There is a lot of arrogance from the top officials. You are a slave. You do what you are told. Otherwise you are fired.' Several people told me about MVP employees being dismissed for spurious reasons, and government employees working in the area being transferred when they angered the MVP. In the words of one clinician who had been transferred for this reason, 'They expect you to do this, do that, according to their tune. If you don't do that you are no good for them.'

Health workers employed by the MVP and the government also told me that they felt the administration had privileged the lives of people living inside the Project boundaries over those of people living just outside its borders, since only the former would show up as statistics concerning the fulfilment of the MDGs. One told me: 'If you are just one household outside the Millennium borders, they are leaving you out. Are these people not human? Do they not deserve help?' Another recounted his experience of the Project as follows:

What I heard when I was entering into the Millennium Project area is that [people living outside the area] are not much considered. I mean, when that person dies – that one who is not in the Project area, they don't mind so much as when someone is from the Project area ... That's how I found it here. You hear even the bosses talking about it like that. Seriously. You hear that if someone in the Project area is to die it is something serious ... Because when that person dies, that means you are 'sabotaging the MDGs'. That's what they say. And

³ Engineer working for a local council in Ruhiira. Author interview, Kabuyanda, Uganda, 11 February 2013.

⁴ Clinical Officer working in Ruhiira. Author interview, Mbarara, Uganda, 19 February 2013.

⁵ Health inspector working for a local council in Ruhiira. Author interview, Kabuyanda, 11 February 2013.

when someone dies outside the Project area, they say 'OK he has died', you know, 'OK, it has happened. That one – ignore it.'6

The same health worker went on to criticize what he saw as the lavish salaries that the administration was paying itself, compared to the low wages paid to implementers. The MVP does not make details of its wage structure publicly available, and did not respond to my request to provide these details. But according to this worker, the highest-ranking administrators were earning as much as 11,000,000 Ugandan shillings (US\$4,230) a month, while he was only being paid 700,000 shillings (US\$270) a month – figures that were broadly consistent with those provided by other employees. He told me: 'The administrators are benefiting a lot when you compare them to the implementers, and of course the implementers – they are the people who matter ... The relationship [between administrators and implementers] is not good at all. We are good enemies!' This was a sentiment shared by many of the implementers I spoke to, as well as those who corresponded with me via notes, emails, and written statements.

Allegations of Mismanagement and Corruption

The depth of the problems that I discovered in Ruhiira might help to explain the restrictions that the MVP has sought to place on independent research. Nevertheless, I was initially surprised by the climate of fear that the administration appeared to have instilled among its employees in order to discourage them from providing information to anyone not officially sanctioned by the MVP. Teachers, medical staff and agricultural extension officers were all wary of speaking to me, although several of them deliberately sought me out to tell me their stories. All insisted on speaking anonymously, and all were afraid of losing their jobs as a result. One told me that he and other employees had been instructed not to speak to anyone about the MVP without permission from the administration. Another was too afraid to speak to me at all, and insisted on meeting me at night outside my hotel, where she silently passed me a slip of paper that listed her complaints. One even told me that he feared for his life. Such fears may appear extreme, but their reasons for contacting me, and my own subsequent experiences, suggest that they were not unfounded.

Many of these implementers sought me out to denounce what they saw as a culture of corruption and nepotism within the MVP Office in Mbarara. Their claims were reinforced by telephone interviews that I later conducted with ex-members of the MVP administration. There were stories of highly qualified and committed staff being forced out of the Project and replaced by the relatives and cronies of specific administrators. Project inputs, such as cement for schools, and motorcycles for Community Health Workers, were said to have gone missing, without any attempt being made to account for their disappearance. Several implementers and beneficiaries of the Project claimed that certain members of the administration were colluding with local council chairmen in falsifying the delivery and receipt of fertilizer, and selling it elsewhere. One lab technician summarised the situation by explaining that she had recently left the MVP because 'I did not wish to see the project... collapsing due to poor skills, full of

⁶ Millennium Villages Project Medical Sector worker. Author interview, Kabuyanda, 12 February 2013.

⁷ Ibid.

corruption, mismanagement of funds and embezzlement of funded things like fertilizers.'8

One of the more persistent allegations concerned the theft of profits obtained through the bulk sale of produce on behalf of local farmers' co-operatives. Many sources referred to a particular instance in 2010, in which beans produced by the Ruhiira Twijukye Women's Association were sold in bulk to the World Food Programme (WFP). The organisation began purchasing beans from this cooperative in 2009, and completed three contracts. The third of these was settled in August 2010, just days after Jeffrey Sachs and the Executive Director of the WFP had appeared in Ruhiira to announce a doubling of the quantity of beans that the WFP would purchase in the future (World Food Programme 2010). The event was widely publicised, and was celebrated with great fanfare on the MVP website (Handa-Williams 2010). The contract, however, was never fulfilled. Records provided to me by the WFP show that the payment for the third contract was for US\$26,928.9 The WFP could not identify the recipient of this payment, but according to one administrator who had worked closely with the women's cooperative, the money had subsequently disappeared, with two different members of the administration each claiming that the other had been in charge of it. When I asked whether the members of the cooperative had complained about the disappearance of their money, the administrator told me 'You see, the farmers - we were dealing with women. They could not complain... But the money disappeared.'10 Rather than complain, however, it seems that the cooperative simply stopped producing for the WFP. This administrator left the MVP shortly after this incident, but other sources told me that supplies to the WFP had collapsed at this point, resulting in the WFP cancelling its contract with Ruhiira in 2011.

The MVP did not respond to my request for information on this issue, but it is notable that there has been no further mention of the World Food Programme on the MVP website since Sachs's triumphant announcement of the expansion of their contact in 2010. Despite the collapse of this contract, the announcement remains on the website at the time of writing, and elsewhere the Project continues to imply that it is still selling produce to the WFP in Ruhiira. In a video on the Tommy Hilfiger Promise Collection website, which was set up in April 2012, Sachs informs us that 'We've helped farmers to be much more productive – more food, school meals, better nutrition'. To illustrate this apparent success, a member of the Ruhiira MVP administration then claims that these farmers 'are bulking and selling to World Food Programme. World Food Programme is coming to this Millennium Village to buy excess food to take to other countries like Somalia, like Darfur [sic]. Just imagine this village which was food insecure is now having food surplus and is selling to World Food Programme! That's what we are

⁸ Laboratory Technician employed by the Millennium Villages Project from 2006-2013. Written statement provided on 9 September 2013.

⁹ Communications and Advocacy Officer of the World Food Programme, 'Re: WFP contract with MVP'. Email to author, 11 October 2013.

¹⁰ Member of the administrative staff of the Millennium Villages Project 2009-2011. Telephone interview, 18 September 2013.

doing.'¹¹ Of course, by the time this video was released, the WFP had not made a payment to the Ruhiira Twijukye Women's Association for almost two years, and it has not purchased any other produce from Ruhiira. Yet as this book goes to press in October 2013, the video is still on the Hilfiger website.

Another persistent allegation of corruption concerned irregularities in the payment of 'top-ups' to government health workers operating in the Project area. These top-ups are intended to incentivize staff and to compensate them for the additional tasks that they perform for the Project. The MVP did not respond to my request for details on the payment of top-ups to medical staff. But according to the reports I received, a senior clinical officer who earned \$350 a month would be promised a top-up of about \$115, while a junior health worker earning \$150 a month would be due a top-up of around \$90 – a significant increase in both cases. Several health workers, however, claimed that the top-up payments were being made irregularly, and that workers were being intimidated into signing documents confirming that they had received the payments even when they had not. If they tried to complain to senior figures in the administration, they were met with silence or threats. I interviewed two workers who had refused to sign the documents. One had been transferred from the Project area. The other had had his payments completely frozen for several months, and was being placed under great pressure to sign the forms. When he complained to the administration, he claims he was told: 'You will never get that money, even if you go to Washington.'12 He told me that he was afraid he might be killed if he continued to resist the demands of the administration, and if they found out that he had spoken to me - fears that are not unreasonable for a poor and powerless man in an isolated corner of a country like Uganda. There were rumours of members of the administration constructing extravagant houses in other parts of the country, and speculation that this was being partly funded through the embezzlement of the top-up funds. One worker explained his perception of the situation as follows:

Some people are not receiving [the top-up] regularly. It comes one month, but the next month it is not coming. The reason? Not known ... My conscience tells me that there must be something behind it. Because we asked ourselves, 'Why does it happen like that? Some months the top-up is coming, then two months it is off, no reason? And later, it comes?' There must be foul play somewhere, and it must be coming from the administration.¹³

The extent of this alleged corruption, and its implications for the success of the MVP, was conveyed in an unsolicited email sent to me by a 'concerned community member', entitled 'The Real Picture of MVP in Ruhiira':

¹¹ This video can be seen on the Promise Collection website under 'Food', http://eu.tommy.com/hilfiger/millennium-promise,default,pg.html (accessed 17 October 2013).

¹² Government health officer working in Millennium Village Project territory. Author interview, Kabuyanda, 13 March 2013.

¹³ Clinical officer working in Ruhiira. Author interview, Mbarara, 19 February 2013.

It is very important that when donors release their funds for a particular cause in society, it should be meant for what it should be for. The MVP has tried ... to improve the standard of living to some extent. However, along the way I feel some key individuals who are running the operations of the entire project have lost the vision of achieving the millennium development goals by 2015 ... The problem now has come in the fact that individuals have decided to personalize [the Project] as their family businesses. Administrators are spending lots of money on themselves while leaving the majority of implementers such as field workers to survive on meagre resources. The end result being loss of motivation among workers thus consequently affecting work at grass roots ... This is evidenced by irregular payment of allowances to workers and sometimes they are not even paid ... There is no transparency in the entire system ... It is my request that the culprits of gross financial mismanagement are followed down to the dot ... Thank you and all the best in your research.14

These allegations were reinforced by a dossier of information that I received in September 2013, several months after I had left Uganda. The thirty-five-page dossier was prepared by several ex-administrators of the MVP, who had worked at the Project Office in Mbarara before leaving earlier that year. Entitled Ruhiira Millennium Villages Project at the brink of collapse, the dossier opens with the claim that 'Peasants face hunger, disease and poverty again as the project strays in office battles' (Anonymous 2013: 1). It includes extensive allegations of corruption within the MVP administration. The dossier claims that the management of the MVP has degenerated since July 2011, when the Country Co-ordinator left the Project, and oversight of procurement and recruitment passed from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the role of which has been 'silently reduced to... issuing contracts to employees and paying their salaries' (Anonymous 2013: 1). In a telephone interview in September 2013, one of the authors of the dossier told me that previously all contracts over US\$500 had to be approved by the UNDP but that the Mbarara Office was now in control of contracts for as much as US\$15,000.15 Another ex-administrator explained that from 2011 onwards, money was sent directly from Millennium Promise in New York to the Mbarara Office, with no questions asked. Oversight of recruitment and procurement was supposed to be provided by the MDG Centre for East and South Africa - the regional centre of Sachs's Earth Institute - but the Centre was failing in this duty. It was at this point, according to this administrator, that 'things started going down and down.'16

¹⁴ Ruhiira community member, 'The Real Picture of MVP in Ruhiira, Isingiro Uganda.' Email message to author, 11 February 2013.

¹⁵ One of the authors of *Ruhiira Millennium Villages Project at the brink of collapse*. Telephone interview 11 September 2013.

¹⁶ Member of the administrative staff of the Millennium Villages Project 2006-2013. Telephone interview 19 September 2013.

The dossier claims that 'On average, the project has handled cash equivalent to \$6m (15bn shillings) annually' (Anonymous 2013: 1), much of which has been embezzled through a variety of scams. Many of the allegations included in the dossier corroborate those made by the implementers I spoke to, which are described above. But the dossier goes far beyond what I am able to include here, in terms of naming specific individuals and specific instances of corruption, nepotism, and unfair dismissal. It contains a detailed account of the alleged theft of profits from the sale of produce to the World Food Programme discussed above. It also includes a similarly detailed description of the theft and sale of a large quantity of fertilizer in 2011, and the subsequent cover-up of this alleged crime, in which the local police and the MDG Centre in Nairobi are said to have been complicit. The dossier reports numerous cases of corruption and nepotism in procurement and recruitment; extensive abuse of expense accounts; and the loss of any vision of 'shared goals towards which the team should be working and the timeframe for achieving them' (Anonymous 2013: 9). Despite having produced the report anonymously, the author I spoke to in September 2013 claimed to be facing a campaign of intimidation from the members of the administration implicated in the allegations. They also told me that the dossier had been sent to Millennium Promise in New York in August, and that two representatives of the organization had arrived in Uganda a few days prior to our conversation to investigate the matter.¹⁷ When I called back a week later, I was told that these representatives had met with the authors of the dossier, and had promised to take action on the basis of their investigations, while also warning them not to circulate the dossier to anyone else. 18 This meeting was confirmed by an email exchange between the authors and Millennium Promise, which was forwarded to me. The emails show that the finance director and the associate counsel of Millennium Promise met with three of the dossier authors in Mbarara on 12 September. 19 The email exchange continues after this meeting, and shows the assistant counsel becoming increasingly dismissive of the authors' requests for news concerning the progress of their investigations, and for meaningful action 'to save the project before it collapses'.²⁰ The final terse message of the exchange was sent by the assistant counsel on 6 October. It reads: 'I appreciate your concern, but the investigation is being handled internally... If we need anything further from you we'll be in touch'. 21 As this book goes to press in October 2013, it remains to be seen what - if any - action will in fact be taken by Sachs's philanthropic foundation. But in a written statement, one of the authors of the dossier told me that the lawyers 'were more worried about the document going out of

¹⁷ One of the authors of *Ruhiira Millennium Villages Project at the brink of collapse*. Telephone interview, 11 September 2013.

¹⁸ One of the authors of *Ruhiira Millennium Villages Project at the brink of collapse*. Second telephone interview, 19 September 2013.

¹⁹ Associate Counsel of Millennium Promise, 'Re: Complaint regarding Ruhiira MVP'. Email sent to an exadministrator of the Ruhiira MVP, 12 September 2013.

²⁰ Ex-administrator of the Ruhiira MVP, 'Re: Complaint regarding Ruhiira MVP'. Email sent to the associate counsel of Millennium Promise, 1 October 2013.

²¹ Associate Counsel of Millennium Promise, 'Re: Complaint regarding Ruhiira MVP'. Email sent to an exadministrator of the Ruhiira MVP, 4 October 2013.

the project to Ministries and Donors than looking at the cause of this'.²² In an email, the same author noted that 'Millennium Promise has not been helpful ever since they visited and discussed with some staff... We don't think their investigations will help us.²³

When You Find Ruhiira Shining

In September 2013 I wrote to the director of communications at the Earth Institute, requesting an interview with Jeffrey Sachs or another representative of the MVP concerning the situation in Ruhiira. When she failed to respond, I sent her a set of written questions regarding the allegations of mismanagement and corruption detailed in the previous section. She did not respond to these questions either. Instead, the General Counsel of Millennium Promise copied me into an email sent to one of my superiors at the university at which I work. The email complained that I had been 'undertaking research activities in the Millennium Village in Uganda without any prior notification or approval by the project', and falsely accused me of representing myself 'as being part of the MVP team'. It went on to stress that 'the MVP has strict protocols in place for approval of any research projects, and certain procedures and agreements to follow when conducting such research'. It concluded by demanding that I 'refrain from contacting... anyone... associated with the MVP for any information unless we have seen evidence of the approvals necessary to conduct his research... His behaviour to date of course concerns me as the general counsel of the project.'24

It is worth emphasising that this attempt to intimidate me into abandoning my research was made while the legal team at Millennium Promise was supposed to be conducting its own investigations into the allegations of corruption and mismanagement contained in the dossier. Unfortunately, I have been unable to further pursue any of the allegations that I have reported here myself, for reasons that will soon become clear. I am therefore reporting them only as allegations, and not as statements of fact. At the very least, they demonstrate considerable discontent within the MVP in Uganda. Jeffrey Sachs may seek to dismiss them in these terms — as the malicious lies of disgruntled workers. But it seems unlikely to me that poor, powerless people would take what they perceived as serious risks with their jobs, and in some cases with their safety, in order to make knowingly false allegations for no personal gain. My perception is that these were people committed to their work, who were brave enough to communicate what they had experienced in the hope that this would make a positive difference to the lives of the people they were trying to help. These are the same lives, let us not forget, that Sachs claims to be 'saving'.

In the context of these allegations, it becomes increasingly difficult to comprehend the basis on which Sachs is making his extravagant claims of success in Ruhiira. Several people who worked with the Project in Ruhiira had seen these claims on the Millennium Villages website, and were incredulous. One health inspector told me: 'When I see such

²² Written statement from an ex-administrator of the Ruhiira MVP to the author, received 11 October 2013.

²³ Ex-administrator of the Ruhiira MVP, 'Re: Follow-up questions.' Email to the author, received 11 October 2013.

²⁴ General Counsel of Millennium Promise, 'Research on the Millennium Villages Project.' Email message copied to author, 10 October 2013.

things, it baffles me, because it's not what is happening." A government health worker remarked: 'On paperwork it is doing well, but down [on the ground] it is not doing what is written on that paper." And an employee of the Project made the following assessment of its achievements: 'Some little change has come. But that's really what I can say. Little ... So really, what they always put on the internet, that "We have achieved this and this" — it is not exactly what they are doing. But we have to take what comes ... We are lacking another option. But the situation is not good."

The illusions of the Project on the internet are matched by the illusions that it stages in Ruhiira itself. This explains the rave reviews that Ruhiira has received from journalists, politicians, businessmen, academics, development students and corporate employees. When comparing these reviews, it becomes clear that everyone who visits Ruhiira through the official channels receives the same carefully orchestrated tour of the 'village'. They all visit the same clinic, the same school, the same water project, the same IT centre. Most of them even visit the same farmer, whose name appears repeatedly in articles, reports and blogs about Ruhiira. In stark contrast to the impoverished farmers I visited, the MVP has provided this farmer with two cows, several goats, and a variety of grafted fruit trees. It has even given him a state-of-the-art biogas cooking system, which is made to appear as if it is standard issue for every household in Ruhiira, although none of the people I spoke to had received one, or knew of anyone who had.²⁸ In the words of one MVP health worker, 'No community involvement: They just use certain homes as demos.'²⁹ Another health worker described the preparations that are made before official visits to Ruhiira:

When we get visits from donor countries – now that is when you find Ruhiira shining! When the visitors are coming. But let them come another time. It is just like that. [When the visitors are coming] of course they have to do some cleaning. They renovate where the situation was going bad ... So it is all about pleasing those visitors. Then [the visitors] go back, and they revert to their normal situation. Those farmers they take [the visitors to meet] – before they have of course talked to them and told them that on such and such a day we will be having visitors, so be ready to show them this and this. Meaning that you have to make sure that you have shown them something good, eh? Not to ashame us. That is what happens ... In my department, in the time I have been there I just saw them once ... We were not allowed to talk to them, because [the administration] don't want you to reveal the challenges ... They were just donors,

²⁵ Health inspector employed by a local council in Ruhiira. Author interview, Mbarara, 9 March 2013.

²⁶ Clinical Officer working in Ruhiira. Author interview, Mbarara, 19 February 2013.

²⁷ Millennium Villages Project medical sector worker. Author interview, Kabuyanda, 12 February 2013.

²⁸ See for example the 'Postcards from Ruhiira' on the Tommy Hilfiger Corporate Foundation website (http://eu.tommy.com/hilfiger/ 108.166.76.198/2012/06/), and the press pack for the Promise Collection. (http://eu.tommy.com/hilfiger/millennium-promise.default.pg.html) (accessed 18 October 2013).

²⁹ Millennium Villages Project health worker. Hand-written note provided 11 March 2013.

whose names I am not sure of. But that's what the office told us, that 'These are the donors, from the US, New York'. That's what they told us.³⁰

Visitors to Ruhiira are completely taken in by this simulation. The following report by a delegation from the University of Notre Dame is similar to many blog-posts and newspaper reports on Ruhiira, and demonstrates the care with which the Ruhiira experience is organized by the administration:

Over twenty Millennium Development Village staff ... greeted us and presented an overview of their goals and efforts to date ... Following the presentation and a brief lunch, our group joined the entire Ruhiira Millennium team for a one-hour drive ... to the sites of the project office, school, health centre, and a local farmer's home ... It quickly became apparent that this project had not been imposed on community members without respect for their wisdom and talents ... In fact, the work was led and supported by members of the community ... Before our departure, a group of women ... bid us farewell with song and dance ... I have learned a great deal about this country and the Millennium Village project and most importantly, about how the project works collaboratively with community members to seek lasting change ... The Ruhiira village is a wonderful model (Shavers 2007).

There Is Nothing on the Ground, and the Project Has Eaten All the Money

Like a Potemkin Village, the perceived success of Ruhiira depends on the maintenance of a carefully managed façade. Given that this is the case, the discovery of someone researching it independently was unlikely to be well received. Several weeks after my arrival in Ruhiira, a member of the administration saw me arranging an interview in one of the main villages. He did not approach me directly, but took my interviewee to one side and spoke to her out of earshot. After that, the woman appeared frightened, and no longer wanted to speak with me. The next morning, the local police detained me in my hotel, and took me to the police station to question me on the nature and objectives of my research. They openly admitted that they had detained me on the request of the Millennium Villages Project, and they were in constant contact via mobile phone with people they identified by name as members of the MVP administration.

Two hours after my detention, a man arrived in the police station, dressed in a crisp black suit that contrasted with the mud walls of the station and the humble clothes of the local policemen. He introduced himself as a member of the MVP administration, and told me his name. This same individual is named in the dossier discussed in the previous section, which claims that 'his work is to spy on other staff and to feed wrong information and rumours to [another member of the MVP administration]' (Anonymous 2013, 9). Sitting alongside the local chief of police, he questioned me aggressively about my activities in Ruhiira, insisting that I had no right to

³⁰ Millennium Villages Project medical sector worker. Author interview, Kabuyanda, 12 February 2013.

be there without having sought permission from the MVP in advance. I was then informed that the same individual who this man allegedly spies for would arrive at the police station the following day to interrogate me further. This person was repeatedly identified in the dossier and by my various informants as the one responsible for orchestrating the corruption and nepotism in the Ruhiira MVP.

While awaiting the arrival of this member of the MVP administration, the police instructed me to remain in my hotel, and retained my passport and other documents. They were apologetic about this, and suggested that the MVP 'must have something to hide'. But as poor local policemen, it was clear that they felt obliged to do the bidding of this wealthy and powerful organisation. Even though I was under effective house arrest at this point, MVP workers continued to contact me, and to tell me about their allegations of corruption and mismanagement. They were prepared to do so, even though they knew I had been detained, and were well aware of the risks that they were taking in communicating with me. The woman who passed her note to me in the darkness and the man who told me that he feared for his life were among those who contacted me at this time.

No one from the MVP arrived the next day, or contacted the police to explain their absence. Under Ugandan law, a detainee can be held for a maximum of forty-eight hours without charge (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative 2006, 7). The following morning, I was released, as the forty-eight hours had elapsed. Soon after my documents had been returned to me, one of the policemen handling my case received a call on their mobile phone. He identified the caller as the member of the MVP administration who had missed our appointment at the police station the previous day. He then put the caller on speakerphone. I heard this individual angrily demanding my detention, and offering to send the police a cash transfer to 'facilitate' my transport to Mbarara – the nearby city where the administration is based. Interestingly, the dossier discussed above alleges that the same individual used the same expression when offering to provide money and fuel 'as "facilitation" to police' when they were investigating the disappearance of large quantities of fertilizer that had been supplied to the Ruhiira MVP in 2011 (Anonymous 2013, 3).

To their credit, the police turned down this offer of 'facilitation' and refused to detain me again. My research assistant and I then left Ruhiira and travelled to another part of the country. Two days after my release, we were contacted by someone in Ruhiira who warned us that I was now being pursued by the Internal Security Organisation on suspicion of 'sabotage of development'. The Internal Security Organisation is the Ugandan counter-intelligence agency, and is notorious for its torture and execution of political prisoners, which it conducts in secret locations in collaboration with paramilitary groups that operate outside the law (Human Rights Watch 2004, 20; Tripp 2010, 137). At this point, my research assistant and I began to fear for our safety. I sent an email to one of Jeffrey Sachs's closest associates at the Earth Institute in New York, informing them of the situation, and demanding that they intervene to prevent it escalating further. They did not respond.

The following day, my contacts in Uganda helped me to arrange a confidential meeting with a trusted senior member of the Ugandan intelligence services. He looked into my

case, and informed me that I was indeed being pursued on suspicion of 'sabotage of development'. The position of the Internal Security Organisation was that the MVP was doing 'good things for the people of Uganda', but that there was an 'international conspiracy' intent on undermining its good work. I had been identified as an agent of this unspecified conspiracy. My objective, allegedly, was to 'tell the world that there is nothing on the ground, and the Project has eaten all the money' – in other words, that the Project is not being properly implemented, and is riddled with corruption. It is surely no coincidence that I had indeed discovered that the MVP was failing in its implementation, and I had indeed received numerous allegations of corruption within it.

That evening, I left Uganda by a minor land border, returning to my home in the UK a few days later. I never received a response to my email from the Earth Institute. Instead, four days after having sent the email, I received an email from the General Counsel of Millennium Promise. The email stated categorically that 'neither [the person at the centre of the allegations of corruption and mismanagement in Ruhiiral, nor anyone on the Millennium Village Project team, had any involvement in the proceedings against you by Ugandan authorities'. It also warned me that 'We will consider any further comments you make about [this individual] with respect to your troubles with the Ugandan authorities to be defamatory.'31 One wonders what reasonable basis a lawyer in New York could have for making such definitive statements about obscure events in an isolated corner of rural Uganda, or what interest Millennium Promise could have in issuing a legal threat of this kind to an independent researcher under such circumstances. Significantly, the dossier discussed above claims that the same individual that Millennium Promise was protecting in this instance 'normally brags about how [they are] protected by the MDG Centre in Nairobi and Prof. Jefferry Sachs [sic] (the founder of the Millennium Promise) we wonder what sort of Technical support this is' (Anonymous 2013, 8).

The Last King of Uganda

As we have seen, Jeffrey Sachs has a close relationship with the Ugandan president, whose regime has a long tradition of using the security services to repress what it perceives as subversive political activity. Sachs likes to emphasize the role of such relationships in guaranteeing the success of the MVP. In his words, 'I think the main effect of the high-level buy-in is ... there's political – I would say, I hope – political protection of the project. It's not so much the direct interventions, you know, having those nice meetings. It's more the fact that the project can go forward' (Sachs 2006, 21). In the case of Ruhiira, 'those nice meetings' with Museveni would seem to have paid off, and Sachs would certainly appear to have all the 'political protection' that he could hope for. This is not, of course, to suggest that Sachs had any knowledge of my presence in Ruhiira, or of the actions taken against me by the Ugandan authorities. Perhaps the general counsel of his organization does not inform him of such matters. In fact, it would appear that Sachs has very little knowledge of what is happening in Ruhiira at all. As of August 2013, to my knowledge, Sachs has made only three fleeting visits to Ruhiira, spending a few hours there in January 2007, in July 2010 and in July 2011. This

³¹ General Counsel of Millennium Promise, 'Response to March 15th Email'. Email message to author, 19 March 2013.

is not surprising for such a busy man. The problem, however, is with the nature of these visits. If Ruhiira is a Potemkin village for its Western visitors, then Sachs is Catherine the Great, and the most spectacular fireworks displays are reserved for his arrival. This is well illustrated by Sachs's visit to Ruhiira to celebrate the ill-fated expansion of the contract with the World Food Programme in 2010. An American academic working with the Project in Ruhiira posted a blog describing the occasion:

Everyone at the MVP office was immersed last week in preparations for the visit on Saturday of Jeff Sachs, the Director of the Earth Institute and Josette Sheeran, the head of the World Food Programme. In addition to these two, there were governmental officials, large staffs, armed police, and press people – maybe 50–80 people in a long line of UN white landrovers ... The tour of Ruhiira for the visitors was similar to the one I did last week. However, this time, there were children or community people at every stop lining the entrances, singing and clapping hands (Powers 2010).

An official video of the event shows Sachs being escorted through throngs of cheering villagers, from a pristine school to an overflowing warehouse and a gleaming water project, in a deluxe version of the standard Ruhiira tour.³² On this evidence, Sachs's visits to Ruhiira are carefully engineered occasions, in which every element of his experience is managed to provide him with an image of a flourishing development utopia, which bears very little resemblance to people's everyday reality on the ground. This is not to say that the people who sing and clap are not genuinely grateful to Sachs for the little they have received from the Project. But, in this regard, Sachs is just reproducing the paternalistic relationships characteristic of Uganda's highly personalized power structures. As one Ugandan commentator has explained, 'People from rural areas treat the provision of services as a favour from the government ... Even if shoddy work is done they remain thankful because they never expected it in the first place' (Nganda 2009). Even so, among the households I spoke to, almost no one had any idea who Sachs was, or had been present at any of his appearances. The only exceptions were three women who were part of a singing group called the 'Millennium Band'. The group was provided with uniforms by the MVP administration and invited to perform on occasions like this, singing songs with lyrics such as: 'Jeffrey Sachs/You have done a lot/God should bless you'.33

Given the nature of Sachs's experience of Ruhiira – and no doubt of the other Millennium Villages – it is unsurprising that he views the MVP as an unqualified success. Like Jim Carrey in *The Truman Show*, Sachs wanders around his Millennium Villages in a state of narcissistic bliss, unaware that his surroundings are being entirely staged for his benefit. Shielded from the troubling realities that lurk all around him, Sachs is given unlimited licence to revel in his imagined identity as Mr Aid. His performance is described in rapturous language on the MVP website:

³² The video can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbTffV-cEBI, accessed October 18, 2013.

³³ Member of the 'Millennium Band'. Author interview, Ruhhiira, Uganda, 10 March 2013.

'Welcome visitors, welcome today. We've all been waiting so long!' Coming over the crest of the hill into the Millennium Village of Ruhiira, Uganda, children's singing voices gradually become louder, intermingled with bursts of clapping and laughter. The long-awaited visitor, Jeffrey Sachs, is due to arrive at any moment, and the anticipation is palpable ... For the people of Ruhiira, the visit ... was a celebration of the fact that today, their story is different. Today, the community was living proof to the world that despite all the scepticism, great stories and dreams can be made a reality as a result of effective synergy between well-targeted aid and community empowerment. 'We haven't done it, you have', proclaimed Sachs, to tumultuous applause and ululation from the crowd of hundreds; babies and grandmothers who had walked from far and wide to catch a glimpse of their hero ... Pledging support to the community until 2015, [Sachs] promised that when that day comes, Ruhiira will be 'a shining example to the entire world ... having shown how this community achieved all the Millennium Development Goals' (Handa-Williams 2010).

Jeffrey Sachs is prone to rejecting criticism of his development strategies by invoking his supposedly unparalleled knowledge of the gritty realities of development, and insisting that 'issues of life and death carry a moral burden to know what you're talking about' (Sachs 2011). Yet his absorption in this messianic spectacle suggests that Sachs himself has no idea what he is talking about in the case of Ruhiira, and may have very little grasp of the reality of the Millennium Villages in general. This ignorance, however, does not prevent him making the strongest claims for the success of the Project, or attacking anyone who attempts to challenge him on the content of these claims. While some may be tempted to pity Sachs for being duped into believing his own hype, his ignorance in this respect can only be described as wilful. If I can go to Ruhiira and discover as many problems as I did in the space of a couple of weeks, then there is no justifiable excuse for Sachs to be unaware of the failures and controversies of his own Project. In his moralizing promotion of his development agenda, Sachs has insisted that the extent of global poverty is 'unimaginable to anyone that knows or cares to look. The only way we could come to this is if you take the decision never to look, and I'm afraid that's the world we're living in right now' (quoted in Washington National Cathedral 2005). Could it be that Sachs has taken the decision not to look at the exclusion of the extremely poor from his own development project, and not to hear the accusations of corruption within it? Could it be that the vast resources of the MVP are primarily devoted not to ensuring its effective implementation on the ground, but to projecting an image of its success on the international stage? At this point, it is worth recalling the assessment of the expert I spoke to before visiting Ruhiira: 'At the top [of the Project] they have to prove that the model works. They don't really care what happens in the villages to the people. What they care about is that their model survives. If they can prove that they can achieve the MDGs ... then for them the job is done.'34

³⁴ Rural development practitioner. Author interview, London, UK, 24 November 2011.

My own experience of the MVP supports this damning verdict. In Ruhiira, the Project is failing to end extreme poverty, or to generate a sustainable and participatory model of rural development. Indeed, by contributing to the legitimation of Museveni's corrupt and authoritarian breed of peripheral dependent capitalism, the MVP helps to keep the donor funds flowing, sustaining the regime in power, and absolving it of any material incentive to become more responsive to the needs of its impoverished population (Jones 2009). In this sense, Sachs is not only failing to end poverty, but is also helping to ensure its continued reproduction. This demonstrates the serious contradictions of his development strategy, and calls into question his assumed identity as Mr Aid. Under these circumstances, it is easy to understand why the MVP might be determined to maintain the appearance of success, regardless of realities on the ground. It is even possible to imagine that the preservation of this appearance might extend to the criminalization of independent research as 'sabotage of development'.

Yet given Sachs's apparent lack of knowledge of the realities of the Project, it would be wrong to draw any such conclusions in his case. Instead, Sachs's determined ignorance of the reality of Ruhiira, and his evident enjoyment of the fantasy that is staged there, suggest that he is not only concerned with legitimizing his strategy to the international community, but is also anxious to conceal something from himself. I have interpreted the MVP as an elaborate attempt to realize Sachs's harmonious vision of capitalist development, which has been cleansed of all traces of the Real that confronted him in Russia. If this is the case, then his obsession with 'proving that the model works' may be driven less by professional ambition or personal commitment than by a dread of something hidden, and a desire to remain lost in a dream.

This dream was scheduled to end in 2015, with the conclusion of the MVP. But in July 2013 the Ugandan government announced that the Project would be extended beyond 2015, and scaled up to five more districts around Ruhiira, supported by an interest-free loan of US\$9.75 million from the Islamic Development Bank. In a press release to mark the occasion, the MVP stated that 'the announcement follows the success of Ruhiira ... which since 2006 has served as a proof of concept of the benefits of an integrated, holistic approach to rural development pioneered by the MVP' (Millennium Villages Project 2013a). A month later, the Islamic Development Bank announced that its loan to Uganda was only a small part of US\$104 million of financing that it is now providing for the scaling up of the Millennium Villages in Uganda, Mali and Senegal, and the launch of a new project - the Sustainable Villages Project - in Chad, Mozambique and Sudan, in partnership with the Earth Institute and Millennium Promise. In the words of Jeffrey Sachs, the Sustainable Villages Project will apply 'cutting-edge methods to the fight against poverty, hunger and disease' (quoted in Millennium Villages Project 2013b). As this book goes to press, further projects based on the Millennium Villages model are being rolled out in Benin, Cameroon, Congo, Guinea, Liberia, Niger, Madagascar, Togo and Zambia. Meanwhile, in Ruhiira the 'extremely poor' remain trapped in their poverty. In Mbarara, the authors of the dossier await news from Millennium Promise. And in New York, Millennium Promise concentrates on securing cash flows, singing its own praises, and silencing independent research. For Jeffrey Sachs, it seems, reality is only valued as a support for fantasy. Beyond that, it is a threat to be repressed. Only one thing really matters: The dream must go on.

Postscript

The deadline for the completion of the Millennium Development Goals passed at the end of 2015. By this time, all the Goals were supposed to have been met in Ruhiira, and in Millennium Villages across sub-Saharan Africa. Yet in contrast to his earlier promises of success in this regard, Sachs has since remained silent on the matter, and the scale-up of the MVP in Uganda never took place. The 2014 Annual Report on the MVP announced that 'a final evaluation will be conducted in 2015 and results will be made available in 2016' (Millennium Promise 2015, 1). But at the time of writing this postscript in January 2018, the promised evaluation has still not appeared, and the MVP website has been inactive for over two years. Meanwhile, Sachs and his wealthy friends have moved on to other messianic endeavours, and the world has forgotten about the Millennium Villages.

The MVP has a lot to tell us about billionaire philanthropy and the global development industry. I have considered these questions elsewhere (see for example Wilson 2014b, 2017a). Here I will conclude instead, in the spirit of 'extreme anthropology', with some brief methodological reflections on conducting research under challenging circumstances of the kind that I confronted in Uganda. Certain details of my detention that were not mentioned in the chapter are relevant in this regard. For example, when the police allowed me to return to my hotel while we awaited the arrival of the MVP administrator, I locked myself in my room and frantically edited my transcripts to remove all incriminating content pertaining to corruption, project failure, and so on. I then downloaded the original files onto a memory stick, which I stashed in the room. When the authorities revised my computer, they only discovered the edited and innocuous version of the transcripts. This helped to counteract the administrator's depiction of me as a malicious trouble-maker. Nevertheless, it was quickly established that I lacked a research permit, at which point the administrator insisted on my immediate transfer to the regional police headquarters in Mbarara, in preparation for my deportation on grounds of 'abuse of migration facility'. To buy myself some time at this crucial point in the proceedings, I told the administrator that I had the personal permission of Jeffrey Sachs to conduct my research. This was stretching the truth -Sachs had only vaguely indicated his approval of the general theme of my research during an informal conversation at a conference in 2011. But it was enough to convince the administrator to have me placed under house arrest while the MVP contacted New York to corroborate my story. The police eventually released me, but only after I had bribed them to do so. The MVP's demand for my re-arrest came after they had received a belated statement from New York, asserting that I did not have clearance from Sachs. Given that the MVP was offering to transfer money to the police to 'facilitate' my rearrest, I had little choice but to pay a further bribe to facilitate my escape.

In 2014, I returned to sub-Saharan Africa to investigate a second Millennium Village, this time in Ghana. Having received a notice of Cease and Desist from the lawyers of Millennium Promise, I concluded that all official channels to the MVP were now firmly closed, and that I had no alternative but to repeat the approach that I had taken in Uganda. Once again, I sought no permission from anyone. I discovered that the Millennium Village in Ghana had been overrun by wildcat goldminers from around the world, and the MVP had been totally eclipsed by the ecological destruction and social

dislocations of the illegal gold industry. Sachs had dealt with this by supressing internal reports, falsifying data, and firing uncooperative staff (Wilson 2016). This time I was able to complete my research undisturbed. I dressed like a foreign gold prospector, and the MVP administrators rolled past me in their 4x4s without a second glance.

I then moved to Ecuador, where I joined a research institute financed by the Ecuadorian government. Our intention was to contribute to the post-neoliberal 'Citizens' Revolution' that was underway in the country. However, it soon became apparent that 'twenty-first century socialism' was a facade, which was functioning to legitimate the reproduction of rentier capitalism. We then used our position within the state apparatus to investigate and reveal the farcical failings of its utopian development projects. This led to my dismissal and the closure of the institute, after which I was blocked from jobs and conferences and eventually obliged to leave the country (Wilson 2017b).

In the summer of 2017 I returned to Ecuador on a tourist visa, and got caught up in a spontaneous uprising against a foreign oil company in a remote corner of the Amazonian region of the country (Wilson and Jarrín 2017). I spent nine days immersed in the struggle, dispatching press releases to contacts in the capital city of Quito who posted them online. As in Uganda, I was detained by the police in my hotel. On this occassion, however, I was rescued by militant members of an indigenous community, who arrived at the hotel armed with spears, and forced the police to release me.

It would be stating the obvious to note that these improvised research projects are woefully lacking in anything that could plausibly be described as a methodology. But they retrospectively reveal the minimal regularities of a kind of ad hoc anti-method, which involves leaping before looking, riding your luck down blind alleys, and trusting complete strangers in the midst of dangerous situations that you do not fully understand. This approach takes inspiration from investigative journalism and the subterranean academic tradition of 'covert research' (Calvey 2017, 2008, Spicker 2011), and abandons any attempt to comply with the risk assessments and research protocols of the capital-state-academia nexus. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, that which betrays a set of principles is defined as 'renegade'. To the extent that this antimethod is based on the betrayal of the ethical principles of neoliberal academia, it can therefore be defined as 'renegade research'. As such, it has a few principles of its own:

- 1. Do not seek ethical approval from your university.
- 2. Do not apply for a research visa from the host government.
- 3. Do not ask for clearance from the institution being studied.
- 4. Do not request informed consent from research participants.
- 5. Tell lies whenever convenient.
- 6. Pay bribes whenever necessary.
- 7. Steal information whenever possible.

These principles are deliberately provocative, open to numerous criticisms, and utterly unworkable in most cases. They may even be regarded as ethically abhorrent. But ethical conduct in the field depends, 'not on the automatic application of programmatic rules, but on examining the ethical implications of process and outcomes in the context in which the research is done' (Spicker 2011, 127-128). The seven principles of renegade

research only hold to the extent that the research in question is directed against the ideological state apparatus and deployed in pursuit of concealed truth – understood in the naively empiricist sense of 'things that power doesn't want you to know'. As such, they reflect what is often required of research committed to uncovering the hidden realities of a system that seems to have everything sewn up in advance, including the rules of research itself. These rules serve to stop us long before the real lines are crossed. Taking risks reveals that things can be pushed a lot further than we think. And in the distance between the imaginary lines of research ethics and the real lines of state repression there is a lot of truth to be told.

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Article

'If I Die Here, I'm a Hero!' On Masculinity and Vulnerability Among Male Asylum Seekers

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Abstract For asylum seekers, masculinity is often a site of conflict, negotiated through competing discourses and public narratives about what it means to be an asylum seeker. Here, the male 'genuine refugee' is often depicted as a feminised, passive victim who 'deserves' humanitarian protection on the base of his vulnerability. Focusing on the crossing of the desert to Libya, this article analyses asylum seekers' positioning of themselves as 'men' through their own narratives as well as the ways in which they engage with vulnerability, victimhood and agency in their storytelling. In particular, the focus lies on two cases, of Hakeem and David, selected from within 36 life history interviews with asylum seekers, refugees, and international protection holders collected in Sicily. For these men, the refugee journey is narrated as an accomplishment not only in terms of receiving asylum, but also in terms of their masculinity, exalting qualities such as endurance, courage, and competence. Two images, of the soldier and the hero, are presented as imaginary positioning of the self. This positioning appears to resolve performative tensions around masculinity/refugeeness, contesting the dominant image of the passive, feminized, helpless subject at the heart of 'the genuine refugee' public narrative. This might also be read as a strategy to reconcile profound questions about identity, the self, and experiences related to trauma and the loss of masculine status in the context of forced migration.

Keywords masculinity, refugee, narrative, life history, forced migration, genuine refugee, vulnerability

Razak, a 19-year-old Gambian asylum seeker, emerges from his room, while I am visiting a reception centre in Sicily. Razak proclaims that he wishes to go back to Libya. His words are received by me and two social workers, Darla and Ada, with great surprise. I have spent the previous six months gathering accounts of people who fled for their lives from Libya. Razak is one of them. I have interviewed this young man a couple of days before and I am curious to know the reasons for his sudden change of mind. Meanwhile, Darla reminds him how terrible Libya is for African refugees. To which Razak responds resolutely: 'I'd rather die in Libya than waste my days in Sicily doing nothing.' His gestures and his tone have now changed. Razak presents himself as a man, not a boy, a man who needs to work and is tough enough to survive Libya, once again. This performative shift is received by Darla and Ada with a warm laugh. They do not take Razak seriously. I do not believe Razak either. Instead, I perceive his utterance as a display of masculinity and a way to express his frustration over the few job opportunities he encountered in Sicily. At the same time, I cannot stop thinking about why this performance of masculinity and toughness resembles a parody? Or why Razak, a few days earlier, appeared so 'credible' to me when narrating his journey to Libya, almost breaking down in tears?

The most interesting element of this performance is the response of the audience, namely, Darla's laughter. This laughter points us towards the complexities of performing masculinity and refugeeness, at the same time. Performing masculinity always entails a negotiation across multiple, and often competing, discourses (Toerien and Durrheim 2001). Masculinity, rather than being analysed as a fixed entity, can be seen as 'a field of conflict that men have to traverse in a quest for coherence' (Toerien and Durrheim 2001, 36). In the case of asylum seekers, given their condition of otherness, this field of conflict involves a consideration of dominant public narratives³⁵ (Somers 1994) about them. As illuminated by Razak's vignette, these narratives connote specific normative assumptions of vulnerability, victimhood and passivity, which highly problematize refugees' gender and sexuality. On one hand, a public narrative depicts the 'bogus asylum seeker,' or 'bad refugee' as a potential criminal, terrorist and abuser of the immigration system (Griffiths 2015) to convey images of marginality, dishonesty, and threat (Zetter 2007). This narrative, as exemplified by the debate that followed the New Year's Eve gang assaults on women in Cologne, is fuelled with 'imageries of a dangerous foreign masculinity' (Scheibelhofer 2007, 102) associated with a spasmodic, archaic, and highly racialized sexuality. In Italy, this discourse entered the recent electoral campaign after the horrific murder of a young woman, allegedly at the hands of a group of Nigerian asylum seekers (Politi 2018). On this occasion, Silvio Berlusconi, the leader of the centre-right coalition, called for the deportation of 600,000 asylum seekers on the basis that only a small fraction of these were 'genuine' refugees. The former Italian Premier added that the rest, living off trickery and crime, constitute a 'social bomb' ready to explode (Politi 2018).

Much like a mirror image (Andersson 2014), a counter narrative conjures the portrayal of the 'genuine' refugee informed by feminised notions of passivity and vulnerability (Oxford 2005, Scheibelhofer 2017, Griffiths 2015). In her study on the representations of refugees in publications of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Johnson (2011) illustrates how the dominant image of the Cold war heroic white male refugee ready to fight for Western political values while jumping from a plane was replaced by the voiceless woman from the Global South, always pictured with a child, beneath the caption 'Click to donate' (Johnson 2011). The feminization and racialization of the refugee category, far from being a means to empower refugee women, has instead strategically coincided with the depoliticisation of the refugee clientele (Johnson 2011) to depict refugees as a mere object of assistance in need of advocacy groups and aid providers to speak on their behalf (McKinnon 2008). The suffering body (Fassin 2001) of the 'genuine refugee' is exposed to the eyes of the Western public as the epitome of the non-threatening subject, ³⁶ to answer the spectre of difference posited by the refugees' condition of otherness (Johnson 2011). Central to this representational shift are the politics of vulnerability promoted by humanitarianism (Ticktin 2016) aimed at mobilising public support for refugee advocacy (Johnson 2011).

³⁵ Somers defines public narrative as 'those narratives attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual' (Somers 1994, 619).

³⁶ This can be observed in the visual politics of rescue operations in the Mediterranean. Here, Europeans are represented saving the helpless refugees while arresting human traffickers and potential terrorists (Musarò 2017).

This politics is based on a rigid gender essentialism,³⁷ where men and women are associated with 'mutually exclusive and oppositional attributes' (Charli Carpenter 2005, 296) around the need for protection.

In their blog posting dated September 6, 2016, in Religion and the Public Sphere, Wilson and Mayelli provide a good example. Following the 2015 UK offer to take up to 20,000 Syrian refugees, David Cameron proclaimed: 'We will take the most vulnerable, we will take disabled children, we will take women who have been raped, we will take men who have suffered torture' (BBC, 2015). Here, 'good refugees' are conceptualised in terms of 'the most vulnerable' ones, who 'patiently wait in refugee camps to be rescued by Western saviours' (Wilson and Mavelli 2016) with protection granted not on the grounds of rights, but based on the capacity of soliciting compassion (Ticklin 2016, Fassin 2001). This focus on gendered notion of vulnerability³⁸ and lack of agency not only ignores the specific issues affecting men in forced migration contexts such as forced military recruitment, torture, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, and summary execution (Carpenter 2005), but it also penalises those who, like Hakeem and David, engage in proactive survival strategies such as crossing Sub Saharan Africa or the Mediterranean (Wilson and Mavelli 2016). Not conforming to the dominant image, the credibility of these young men is often jeopardized and their claims are met with suspicion and disbelief.³⁹ This is due to the fact that the refugee status determination is structured as a process of recognition of a priori subjective condition, as defined by the UN Refugee convention (1951);40 therefore, it demands the applicant's ability to interpellate refugeeness as 'a recognizable identity' (Luker 2015, 92) within the refugee determination procedure.41 This process entails two opposing sides: the non-citizen subject (i.e. asylum seeker) and the sovereign State (Zagor 2014). In front of such a structural power imbalance (Zagor 2014) the performance of a recognisable identity must be obtained through conformity (Zetter 1991). Therefore, it has to fit some sort of a dominant narrative, or what Langellier calls 'the continued retelling of tales of plight

³⁷ See the brilliant work of Carpenter (2005) on the use of gender essentialisms in transnational efforts to advocate for the protection of war-affected civilians.

³⁸ On this matter, Charsley and Wray (2015) mentioned the section 3.4 of the Procedural Standards for Refugee Status Determination under United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Mandate (UNHCR, n.d.) which identifies, again, some specific groups of asylum seekers - women who are at particular risk in the host country, elderly asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors and asylum seekers that require medical assistance among others, as 'applicants with special needs'. According to the UNHCR (n.d.) guidelines, these should be prioritized in reception and registration procedures. Here, the two scholars conclude that: 'All refugees are, by definition, vulnerable but some are regarded as particularly so' (Charsley and Wray 2015, 413).

³⁹ Patrick Strickland (2016), in his piece 'Why the world is afraid of Refugee Men?', illustrates how being a young man in military age and in good health is often presented by far right politicians as being incompatible with the need of humanitarian protection and is used in the rhetoric of invasion.

⁴⁰ The UN convention (1951) defines a 'refugee' as a person who '...owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion...'.

⁴¹ In Italy, this process entails a first instance procedure, in which the Territorial Commissions for the Recognition of International Protection (Commissioni territoriali per il riconoscimento della protezione internazionale) interviews the applicant (Bove 2017); and a subsequent judiciary appeal if a negative decision is issued by the Commission (Bove 2017). Three different forms of international protection might be granted: refugee status, subsidiary protection, and permit on humanitarian grounds (Bove 2017).

and flight' (Langellier 2010, 70). At this juncture, what happened to individuals not conforming to the canonical narrative of the 'genuine refugee'? Is there any room for subaltern voices to enact some sort of 'resistance' narrative contesting the representations and moral imperatives imposed by the dominant narrative (Fivush 2010)?

My goal here is to study the performance of masculinity in the context of refugee stories; that is, the ways in which participants position themselves as 'men' within their narratives. Narratives are stories that define who we are in time and place and in relation to others (Fivush 2010). Storytelling can be intended as performance (Langellier 2010, Riessman 2008) situated and accomplished dialogically (Langellier and Peterson 2004) with an audience. I assigned myself the role of immediate audience but I also took into account the wider audience to which these narratives, being embedded in the refugee regime, are subjected to. Given that for asylum seekers storytelling most of the times concerns a negotiation of what it the safest thing to say (Jackson 2013), I am also interested in exploring how participants engage with gender implications of the 'genuine refugee' narrative around vulnerability, victimhood and agency.

In order to do this, I will specifically focus on one particular segment of the journey – the crossing of the desert to Libya – which is universally described by media, international organizations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as one of the most deadly migration routes (Kingsley 2015, Unicef 2017). Here, people on the move are exposed to extreme weather conditions and multiple abuses (Amnesty 2017) from armed groups, people smugglers, criminal gangs and militias. Two cases, of Hakeem and David, were selected among life history interviews collected during my doctoral research fieldwork in Sicily with asylum seekers, refugees and international protection holders. They were selected as they both share a general thematic interest (Riessman 2008) in presenting the experience of the desert crossing as a basis to make claim about their manhood rather than to present themselves as vulnerable victims.

⁴² A dialogic-performative narrative approach to data analysis was applied, influenced by the work of Riessman (2008, 2003) and Langellier and Peterson (2004). The approach incorporates elements of thematic and structural approaches with a dialogic-perfomative framework (Riessman 2008); what is said/how is it said is interrogated together with 'who' an utterance may be directed to, 'when', and 'why', that is, for what purposes (Riessman 2008, 105). Hakeem and David were interviewed by the researcher using the life history method; they were asked to narrate their stories starting from their lives back home to their resettlement in Sicily. The performance of the narrative of desert crossing to Libya was analysed in relation to the broader interviewe (both in terms of structure and content), the intersubjective construction of meaning between interviewer and interviewee and the 'genuine refugee' public narrative. Primary attention was given to: a) the plot of the story – including ordering/sequence, turning points and the selected genre, b) positioning of the participant in the story as a character, and c) positioning of secondary characters in relation to the participant; d) positioning of different audiences by the narrator. All the information that might directly identify the informants were removed, omitted or modified, including key components of research design such as sampling criteria (i.e. nationality), participants' location and identity of gatekeepers. Pseudonyms were used instead of real names. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form prior to being interviewed.

⁴³ This is because the refugee's story told at the asylum hearing becomes a yardstick against which subsequent versions will be measured (Kirmayer 2003).

Narratives of the Desert

Hakeem and David are both West African asylum seekers residing in Sicily at the time of the interview;44 they both entered Libya after the collapse of Gaddafi's regime, undertaking the same desert route from Niger. Hakeem is a 24-year-old single man who travelled alone and identifies as a Muslim; he left his country after being wrongly imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. David, who undertook the journey with his wife, is in his thirties and identifies as a Christian; he left his home country due to the generalised violence which made him and his family fear for their lives. In terms of their socioeconomic position, David comes from a middle class, urban background while Hakeem is the first male son of farmers. For both of them, the refugee experience has represented a journey to 'declassation', 45 not only in terms of their extreme impoverishment, but also in terms of loss of economic, social, cultural, symbolic and human capital (Van Hear 2006). In this regard, the drastic changes men face as a result of forced migration, of course, affect their masculinity also in terms of the perceived threat of 'feminization.' In her study of masculinities in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, Desiree Lwambo cites a participant's quote: 'before the war, I was a man' to point out how the armed conflict led to the emasculation of male farmers once they were unable to carry out their farming activities (Lwambo 2013). It is worth noting that the feminization of refugees, as argued by Hyndman and Giles, is not just a representational issue, but it also invests the material conditions of forced migration (Hyndman and Giles, 2011). Being unable to protect and provide for themselves and their families (Jaji 2009) during the flight and in refugee camps (Turner 1999), and being unable to behave as adults once they enter the asylum system – working, making decisions about their lives, forming stable families (Griffiths 2015), the asylum seeking condition can be a source of shame and stigma for men (Griffiths 2015). To emphasize the performative-narrative element is not to deny the 'materiality' of these experiences, which in the case of desert crossing entails exposure to highly traumatizing events;⁴⁶ to the contrary, the aim is to throw light upon the ways in which narratives mediate, and therefore make meaning of these events through the act of storytelling; here, with regard to masculinity, narrative becomes a site of exploration of the complex cultural conflicts (Langellier 1999) that gender performing embodies at the intersection of reallife experience, discourse and subjectivity.

The story of Hakeem is very common among asylum seekers in Sicily. It is a story of a solitary journey undertaken by a young man that has to face many difficulties and challenges to finally reach safety in Italy: the flight from his country, where he managed to escape police custody; the escape at night across the border like a fugitive; the wandering across West African countries in search of jobs. At one point, some friend suggested Hakeem to go Libya where there seemed to be more plentiful opportunities to make money. The friend was right, Libya is a place where a man on the move can easily find jobs, but the cost, according to Hakeem, was high. He describes Libya as a

⁴⁴ Fieldwork took place from September 2016 to May 2017 in Sicily.

 $^{^{45}}$ I acknowledge that this concept was suggested by Tereza Kuldova in one of her comments on earlier draft of this article.

 $^{^{46}}$ Indeed, I am convinced that underestimating the materiality of these traumatic experiences, and their consequences on participant's lives, would be profoundly unethical.

'terrifying' place and he uses a very powerful metaphor of 'a well': 'if you enter there, you will never come back...' This metaphor illustrates a theme which is very common in narratives of people fleeing through Libya: the impossibility to go back due to the risks associated to desert crossing. Risks that, according to Hakeem, we do not perceive in Europe, seeing only what happens to people on the move in the Mediterranean Sea. Hakeem recounts how he spent five days on a pickup truck in the Sahara, after the driver got lost in the dunes. This was too much: being without water or food, they feared for their lives. Once in Libya, Hakeem had to face more adversities. In Qatrun, black migrants are a target of violence and exploitation by rebel groups, militiamen, and gang members; Hakeem starts thinking about going back but the possibility of re-entering the Sahara was too scary: 'I was always thinking how to go back, but the Sahara, I was so afraid.' Being unable to go back, he can only go forward. He decided to move to Sebha, where he thought he would find a better situation. He was wrong. Once there he finds himself in the middle of tribal fighting. Guns and militia are everywhere and migrants find themselves living in overcrowded compounds. It is here that he begins to feel 'disappointment' about his condition of being a refugee in Libya.

What for Hakeem was a 'well', is in David's narrative represented as the Biblical cursed land. 'Desert is a cursed land! In the Bible! You know that the desert is a cursed land! Whereby you can't find any living thing! You understand?' David recalls how the journey through the desert is lonely and marked by a desperate individualism with no room for solidarity or compassion. 'When you are embarking on a journey, that's why I said your brother will be your enemy! When you are embarking on such journey, passing through the desert, there's no brother!'

Here, everything can happen to black travellers. Smugglers and rebel groups have the power of life and death over those who are fleeing. Drivers are defined as 'criminals' that constantly rob, beat, and kidnap people on the move. The pickup truck would stop in the middle of the desert and they would be searched for money. Men would be searched even in their anus. That is how David lost all the money he had. Women would be raped in front of everybody with no possibility for men to intervene. Traveling with his wife, David managed to 'protect' her by making her wear typical Muslim clothing, even though they were Christian, after the advice of his 'gate man'. 'You have to adapt in every situation you find yourself. Just to make ... you understand? So my wife was dressed like them!', said David. Then, he recounted the experience of witnessing human traffickers' brutality towards female travellers:

'I told my wife you see what our girls are passing through? – a girl said – 'I wanna go back!' How come you will go back? How can you go back? It's not done! You can't go back, you have to face! You have to face it! You understand? For what for whatever!'

This introductory part of both narrative performances seems to be perfectly aligned with the 'genuine refugee' narrative, conveying the primary message of vulnerability, hardship and exposure to dangers, and subsequently the impossibility of coming back, associated with the journey. However, things change when participants locate themselves as 'men' within these narratives. The episode of David's wife wearing Muslim clothing is

a good example; here, David wants to illustrate his value as a husband who is able to 'protect' his wife, distancing himself from other travellers who are instead, in David's words, not as much 'oriented'. He also implies how thanks to his capacities he was able to outsmart the brute forces of human traffickers.

Crossing of the Desert as a Gendered Enterprise

Once asked to locate themselves as men in these narratives of desert, the gender dimension of the crossing enterprise becomes very clear. First of all, because of the continued exposure to hardship and danger that involves cultural discourse on masculinity, toughness and strength. Secondly, due to the fact that human traffickers, who have the power of life and death over black travellers, are all men. This creates a specific dynamic where masculinity becomes central to framing power relations and hierarchy among men and with women. In both Hakeem and David's narratives of the desert, smugglers and armed groups assume the role of the villains who perpetrate violence and abuse the black travellers. At the same time, fellow refugees are positioned in the story in terms on how they 'resist' hardship of the journey-including smugglers' abuses.

The crossing of the desert might be therefore seen as a moment of engagement (Connell 2005) with hegemonic masculinity's ideal. Hegemonic masculinity, although a contested concept (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), is to an extent useful when trying to denote – at least as a cultural ideal (Toerien and Durrheim 2001) – dominant forms of masculinity prevailing in any given context, both in relation to other masculinities and to women. Hegemonic masculinity tends to be equated with dominance, control, strength and authority (Andersson 2008). In line with existing literature on rites of passage that highlights how migration can become an opportunity to signify masculinity (Monsutti 2007, Boehm 2008, Choi 2018), in these narratives of desert, exposure to risk, dangers and traumatising experiences are contextualised to narrate tales of resistance and endurance rather than victimhood. Difficulties are regarded as 'beneficial' as through these the traveller may prove his manhood. Here, we could see how the whole experience of the desert journey to Libya is told as a gendered enterprise:

'Life is not always plain! You understand? You must endanger (encounter) some difficulties along! You understand? Before you be a man you must encounter difficulties! So I just believe you have to take these risks ... for you to get where ... will be beneficial to you! You understand? [inaudible] we must have that in mind! You understand? People knew Libya wasn't peaceful. But they still take, take the risk ... you understand?' (David).

Accordingly, Hakeem affirms that to succeed in the desert crossing one,

'has to be a man, have to be a soldier, a military, a soldier' and affirms 'You have to, you have to (act like a military) ... everyone would have to behave like this...because if you are not, you gonna lose (your life)'. When I ask why, he replies: '...because it's like, now, there's no woman, there's nobody. Everyone is thinking of himself, everyone is

now selfish ... because (you think) you're going to die ... yes' (Hakeem).

The reference to military masculinity makes sense as soldiers are those who professionally engage in dangerous situations to prove their masculinity (Belkin 2012). At this juncture, the selected narrative genre clashes with the 'genuine' refugee narrative characterised by the continued retelling of 'tales of plight and flight' (Langellier 2010, 70), emerging more like a story of coming of age, or even of a hero's journey (Campbell 1993); in this genre, the boy acquires a new level of manhood through his ability to overcome hardship and dangers. This can be seen when Hakeem describes how asylum seeking men in Sicilian reception camps discuss their experience in the Sahara to compare their masculinities in terms of resistance and strength. Hakeem tells how some travellers will even exaggerate these traits in order to present themselves as 'more' manly: 'You are soldier ... you are (more) a man than me! Yeah, of course, you are (more) a man than me, you are a soldier ... [Inaudible] [laugh] Me, I face two days without water ... if someone tells me two weeks ... without water ... how can I believe it?' (Hakeem). Again, the desert crossing is narrated as a gendered enterprise in which masculinities are scrutinized, evaluated and put in hierarchy.

Performing Masculinity and Refugeeness

Performing masculinity always requires a negotiation across discourses and different subject positions. Discourses, in this regard, can be understood as cultural resources (Toerien and Durrheim 2001) through which gendered selves are constructed (Brickell 2005) or performed. A relevant literature on men and victimhood (Åkerström, Burcar, and Wästerfors 2011, Burcar and Åkerström 2009, Andersson 2008) has shown how this can be creatively done by men in their narrative accounts. At this point, the refugee story becomes a privileged site not only to study masculinity, but also the capacity of subaltern, marginalised groups to confront, resist or contest dominant narratives (Langellier 2010). Recounting the circumstances of the journey, Hakeem chose the genre of a coming of age story. When asked to think about how the journey has changed him as a man, Hakeem said he acquired more patience, more understanding, more experience. A new level of maturity is achieved for a man who was just a young boy when he left home. Hakeem recalls how he did not have that kind of patience when he was at home. The journey, instead, made him more aware, self-disciplined and selfcontrolled. In this regard, the discourse around military masculinity is powerful as it provides Hakeem a structure to negotiate meaning about what happened to him. Hakeem sees himself as a refugee man who has dealt with many experiences and survived those; a 'man', finally, who managed to escape from that well.

Hakeem: ... [confused] this thing... encourage (me)... this thing; if I think about the journey think I feel happy.

Interviewer: Why?

Hakeem: That now, I've crossed ... whereby the way that I'm seeing in America, in Europe, in films fighting for themselves, in countries, I do [confused] that is like a gift to me, how escape from

that prison, how I make it up, and now I'm in Italy, having a better life in Italy, I'm very ... it's a big success to me ... I didn't think I'll be too proud of it because from that place I escaped, the hospital, that place ... it was terrible ... I was sick ... it was terrible ... so I feel very happy if I think about how I do I ever to do it ... how I managed.

Completing the journey, navigating multiple life threating situations and risks, was presented as a 'big success' for Hakeem. Without denying his fears and acknowledging the burden of pain and suffering, Hakeem narrates a story of success. Through this narrative choice, he managed to present some sort of agency: escape from the prison, journey through Libya, arrival in Italy. Interestingly, he refers to Western movies, mostly Hollywood's military genre, and locates his experience within this imaginary where the protagonist 'fights for' his life.

In the case of David, the selected genre is more recognisably one of the hero's journey (Campbell 1993). This is exemplified in a highly dramatized moment (Langellier 2010) when David is on the boat a few minute befores it capsizes. Thinking he is going to die, he makes sense of all that he has been through since he left home:

'What I said "ah! If I die here"... I said "If I die here, I'm a hero!"... I said "If I die here, I'm a hero! I've tried!"... You understand? [Laugh] That was my thinking! You understand? I said if I die here, I'm hero, because nobody is going to know I die here... you understand? But to me! Wherever I'll be! I am hero because it's not easy to pass through the desert...! If you cannot sustain the desert ... there's no way you sustain the water! But if you can sustain the desert, you sustain the water ... you understand? So I said I'm a hero, because I've heard of Sahara, in the Bible! Cursed land! And I heard of the Mediterranean Sea! And this is where we are! [Inaudible]...I'm hero if I die here!' (David).

The 'before you be a man you must encounter difficulties' finally finds its conclusion on the waves of the Mediterranean Sea: through the journey David sees himself as a hero who managed to survive multiple difficulties and risks. The reference to the Biblical view of the desert as a 'cursed land' clarify which cultural template is cited by David. The Bible provides many examples of a hero's journey, such as Moses (Wilson 2013). Here strength, wisdom, honour, solidarity, fertility, and marriage are seen as keys to masculinity (Wilson 2013, 341). These themes are clearly recognizable in David's account. An indicative example is how he narrates the terrible tales of the smugglers' abuses to refugee women in order to mark them as godless. This narrative choice aims at presenting himself as the opposite: a family man with strict moral and religious codes.

This choice of the hero-soldier as the idealized symbol of masculinity is a monomyth (Campbell 1993) common to many cultures and across time (Sullivan and Venter 2005), from Ulysses to Vin Diesel. Whitehead views the Hero as the ubiquitous and exemplary symbol of manhood, characterised by a common core of transcendental courage in the face of danger (Whitehead 2005). There is no doubt that through this imaginary

positioning of the self (Wetherell and Edley 1999), both Hakeem and David are making a claim about their manhood despite and within the refugee experience. In the selected genre of coming of age story/hero's journey, masculinity is achieved and proved rather than annihilated. This narrative choice might be read as a form of contesting the gender implications of the 'genuine' refugee narrative as both the hero and the soldier are the antithesis of any emasculated, victimised subject. Through this narrative choice, participants also manage to not fall into the 'bogus asylum seeker' negative stereotype as the soldier-hero represents a purified ideal of masculinity (Dawson 1994).

At this point we should ask why this story was narrated this way. The reference to the hero-soldier seems to correspond to some sort of self-exalting strategy (Wetherell and Edley 1999). Through this heroic positioning (Wetherell and Edley 1999), in fact, David and Hakeem put themselves above all the other men (and women) in the narrative performance (including the audience). I view this as a response to the masculine anxiety, namely, the fear of a collapse in self-identity as a man (Whitehead 2005) produced by the refugee experience, including the emasculating and infantilising aspects associated to the asylum system (Griffiths 2015). Refugees and asylum seeking men find themselves navigating complex dynamics of shame (Kabesh 2013) and stigma (Jackson 2013) associated with the loss of masculine status, at the intersection of class, gender and race. Hakeem, for example, recalls how the flight deprived him of his bright future as the first male son of the family, the one who was going to be in charge of the family business after his father death.

Interviewer: Do you miss your country sometimes?

Hakeem: Not sometimes, that's always!

Interviewer: Always...

Hakeem: I have to be at home! Because I have things to control!

Interviewer: What kind of things?

Hakeem: I have things to work there! I have to do my life! People, I have people to work for me! Not people I work for, people, people pay me!

In this extract, Hakeem expresses his frustration over the asylum seeking condition. Now, he finds himself working, often being exploited, for other (white) men in Sicily while in his farm he would have 'people working for him.' When he says 'I have things to control!' he is precisely reclaiming his masculine status, lost as a result of the flight; but he is also contesting the emasculating aspect of the refugee system, where asylum seekers experience a lack of control over their lives, being unable to work and relying only on state aid. The nostalgia for his home is immediately reconnected to his masculinity. At home, Hakeem felt in control and with a purpose due to his position as a firstborn male son in the family. In Sicily, he faces severe marginalisation. For David, the loss of masculine status is connected to his socio-economic status and his capacity of 'protecting and providing for' his wife. He aims to reclaim the role of head of the family,

dangerously challenged by the forced migration experience, by showing that his capability of taking care of his wife in the context of the desert crossing. Later in the journey, however, before reaching Italy, the two will be separated and this will create a great sense of loss and failure in David.

These power struggles across masculinity become particularly visible by looking at the relationship between narrator and audience. Issues of power are embedded in all research relationships (Hugman, Pittaway, and Bartolomei 2011) but they are particularly challenging in the field of forced migration. Being a white Sicilian native interviewing black asylum seekers in Sicily, it is very important to acknowledge the relations of power that narratives inhabit and create (Forman 2006). At this juncture, David, who is older than me, uses a paternalistic approach, maybe to respond to some sort of dynamic at the intersection of masculinity, class, age and race. For him it is also very important to clarify that thanks to his education he is capable of not only understanding but also evaluating what I am doing. That is why he would often refer to me using expressions such as 'if you carry out a proper research' or adding 'you understand?' at the end of each sentence. His style of talk and gestures would convey a message of maturity, masculine competence and wisdom as he was trying to kindly educate me on research, life and marriage. On the other hand, Hakeem aims at demonstrating that he is different from other fellow asylum seekers who did not want to be interviewed, clarifying that he perfectly understands the reason why I am conducting this research and its relevance. Hakeem was also the only participant across the whole fieldwork experience who asked to see my LSE badge as proof of identification during informed consent negotiation. Again, both participants want to convey notions of masculine competence, and, most importantly, agency. This interrogation of the teller/ audience relationship in the wider interview situation provides a few more insights on the performance of masculinity in the context of the desert crossing narratives. Presenting themselves as agentic subjects, 47 the refugee journey is reconfigured as an arena in which the masculine status, once lost as a result of the flight, can be regained through the performance of a heroic masculine self, capable of resisting adversities and sufferings. At this juncture, participants' culture and habitus (Bourdieu 2001) play a crucial role. This is quite evident in David's story where the tactic to 'resist' the 'genuine' refugee narrative is the interpellation of a traditional discourse of masculinity, that is, the Biblical hero's journey. Given that the primary aim of narration is to provide a sense of coherence, order and meaning to fragmentary events (Kirmayer 2003), the reference to a traditional discourse of masculinity seems to offer a clear structure to negotiate what has happened, the archetypal monomyth (Campbell 1993) of the 'hero-soldier'; around this template, participants reconcile profound questions about identity, self, and traumatic experiences (Kirmayer 2003). This can be particularly seen through the position of the villain in the story; the image of the hero is dependent on the villain (Whitehead 2005). In the case of these narratives of desert, the villains are the smugglers/armed groups inhabiting Libya no man's land. The villain and hero are complementary figures who are bound together by a common ideology of masculinity

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⁴⁷ It is acknowledged that one of the main existential functions of storytelling is to provide a sense of agency, especially in disempowering circumstances, as illustrated by the seminal work of Jackson (2013). The issue, here is how this is done contingently through storytelling. In the cases of Hakeem and David, masculinity seems to offer a structure to negotiate agency across public and private meanings (Jackson 2013).

(Andersson 2008). This positioning might help David to resolve the victim/perpetrator dichotomy; as suggested by Kjerstin Andersson, in fact, in the fight between the hero and the villain 'there is no victim' (Andersson 2008, 139).

Conclusion

The two stories presented provide some insights into the complex process of performing masculinity in narratives of forced migration. First of all, they underline the difference between how we talk about asylum seeking and refugee men, and how they talk about themselves and their experience.

These two interviews clearly show the relevance of masculinity in making sense of the journey. The crossing of the desert to Libya is narratively constructed as a gendered enterprise that men on the move undertake. Due to the difficulties and hardship associated with the journey, including loss of masculine status as a result of the flight, these enterprises might also be perceived as moment where masculinities are scrutinised, proved and regained through the performance of a heroic masculine self. In this regard, the arrival in Italy is narrated as an accomplishment not only in terms of safety and possibility of asylum, but also for their manhood. Both Hakeem and David feel they have demonstrated something to themselves and to their audiences exalting qualities they ascribe to their masculinity, such as endurance, courage, self-discipline, and self-reliance. These characteristics allow participants to locate themselves as 'men', not as passive or vulnerable victims, in their narratives of forced migration.

Two images, one of the soldier and another one of the hero, are presented as imaginary positioning of the self (Wetherell and Edley 1999). The selected genre of coming of age/hero's journey seems to resolve performative tensions around masculinity/ refugeeness, resisting, or at least contesting, the gendered implications of the 'genuine' refugee narrative, yet without falling into the 'bogus asylum seeker' negative stereotype. In this regard, participants' heroic positioning might be regarded as a response to the fear of a collapse in self-identity as a man (Whitehead, 2005) produced by the refugee experience; it might also be seen as a way to navigate the victim/perpetrator dichotomy associated with exposure to highly traumatizing experiences. In absence of other opportunities, the monomyth (Campbell 1993) of the masculine hero-soldier might be the only available, even though significantly inadequate, strategy to reconcile profound questions about self, masculine identity, and vulnerability. In this regard, refugee policies toward men need to fully address gendered implications of forced migration and asylum, as it is advocated for refugee women (Freedman 2012). According to the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) managed by the Ministry of the Interior in partnership with local authorities, 86,6% of their adult beneficiaries are men⁴⁸ (Caldarozzi et al. 2017, 37). The number increases significantly if we also take into account unaccompanied minors. At the moment, however, gender is never regarded as a key factor in planning interventions and programmes toward asylum seeking and refugee men. In this context, a new approach is strongly needed; in particular, when dealing with asylum seekers and refugees' exposure to trauma, loss and marginalization or in the context of help seeking (Addis and Mahalik 2003); here, discourse of

 $^{^{48}}$ This figure reaches almost 100% for some West African countries, such as Gambia, Senegal and Mali (Caldarozzi et al. 2017, 37).

masculinity ('take it like a man') seems to powerfully operate making their experiences invisible and their voices silenced.

Lastly, these two narratives also offer an opportunity to deconstruct more broadly the politics of storytelling (Hammack and Cohler 2011, Hammack 2011, Jackson 2013) that frames refugee determination procedure. What happens to asylum seeking men who contest/resist the 'genuine refugee' narrative in the context of asylum hearings? Do they have less opportunity to be granted asylum? Further research must investigate the role of masculinity discourse in the asylum deliberation process and its political implications on people's claims.

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Article

Who Are You Calling a Hackney Twat?

Gender and Stigma in Media Representation

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Abstract This article explores attitudes in the United Kingdom towards male dress, grooming and lifestyle choices, in relation to concepts and accusations of pretentiousness. Taking the recent and broadly defined phenomenon, the 'hipster', as a case study, I analyse discourse in the last decade from a range of media that feature hipsterism. Nearly all media coverage of hipsters has focused on men, reflecting gendered cultural prejudices about styles that require a certain level of both cultivation and maintenance. I investigate how parody conveys cultural distaste, which I contend, mask anxieties about the subversion of norms regarding gender and class. I consider the question of classification with regard to hipsters and the role of stereotyping. By drawing on Dan Fox's (2016) defence of pretentiousness as a catalyst of cultural innovation, I consider taste in relation to authenticity and pretentiousness with regard to what is represented as male hipster adornment. I propose that while attitudes to gender and class have been reformulated, media critique of styles labelled as pretentious reveals entrenched, if repackaged, cultural prejudices and insecurities.

Keywords Hipsters, critical media discourse, pretentiousness, authenticity, masculinities, lifestyles, stereotypes, stigma, class, taste

So, what of the hipster? This figure, now evident on a global level through a supposedly recognisable index of stylistic attributes and lifestyle habits, has been the subject of a considerable amount of media scrutiny. Furthermore, much discourse on the subject in both the media and in relevant literature has become, if not exhausted, then recycled. This study offers a dissenting postscript to the mythologised phenomenon of hipsterism in the United Kingdom. This trope for post-millennial anxieties continues to connote, not only particular tastes in lifestyle and appearance, but also an ethos that informs this taste. As a subject, hipsterism, it seems, is no longer addressed by the media as newsworthy, and as with so many other discernible shifts in taste heralded by the media, the absorption of many of its identifiable features into the mainstream have rendered it unremarkable. That said, a good deal has been attributed to hipsters, as any Google search will confirm; however, in a limited field of study dominated by literature from the United States (Bot 2012; Greif, Ross and Tortorici 2010; Kinzey 2012) and continental Northern Europe (Maly and Varis 2016; Michael 2015; Schiermer 2014), a specifically British context is at present underrepresented (Hubbard 2016; Wessendorf 2013). This study focuses on London and is an analysis of British media content from 2010 to 2016, a historical window that corresponds to the period in which the hipster had become au courant in the British media until the inevitable predictions of its demise.

I argue that during this period 'hipster' became a convenient adjectival signifier for consumption habits considered aesthetically and symbolically deficient despite, and

perhaps because of, the diffusion of their influence. Already in 2010 Ruby Warrington claimed in the *Sunday Times* that the 'incredibly irritating hipster look has gone global,' (Warrington 2010) when reporting an anti-hipster backlash due to apparently offensive lifestyle cues. Since then the broad consensus in the UK media is that 'the hipster is not a well-liked figure' (Schiermer 2014, 167). Although closer scrutiny of mainstream media reveals a certain, cautious degree of defence, and in social media some spirited challenges to prejudicial attacks, by 2016 most representation of the hipster placed this figure somewhere between a contemporary jester and a neo-liberal folk devil.

My study operates as a reflective critique of public discourse dependent on casual and facile stereotyping and prejudicial assumptions. As theoretical guidance, I take Dan Fox's (2016) radical reappraisal of the cultural value and significance of pretentiousness. Fox issues a call to arms for a deconstruction of a wide range of contemporary doxas across the ideological spectrum. Without pandering to a reactionary agenda, or adopting a fixed ideological view within the simplistic, conventional dichotomy of 'left' and 'right', Fox questions associations and assumptions made about the nexus between class, taste and gender, and in doing so he offers a radical reappraisal of artifice as a positive aspect of social performance. This study is concerned with media representation of male hipsters, for reasons outlined below. Through employing a set of redefinitions of this usually embodied abstraction, the male hipster, alongside a contextualised analysis of authenticity, stereotyping and stigmatisation, I challenge assumptions made in lexical and visual media representation by interrogating both the veracity of specific representations and the premises that underpin them.

Methodology

This study is positioned as an initial inquiry that follows an 'inter-disciplinary approach to language' that seeks to understand the way discourse operates in 'social processes' (Flowerdew and Richardson 2017, 21), of which the effects of media representation is one. It draws on a range of established qualitative methodological frameworks and approaches, within critical discourse analysis, to explore representation in the media as a 'symbolic environment'. In this, certain 'agendas' played out (Shoemaker 2014, 4) are informed by discourse 'underpinned by ideologies' (Flowerdew and Richardson 2017, 21). Broadly, the term ideology follows the conception of power and influence as proposed by the Gramscian notion of 'hegemony' (Gramsci, Hoare and Nowell-Smith 1971), a form of 'third power' (Lukes, 2005) that acts as an internalised means of persuasion that may 'appear natural ... common sense, and thus ... often invisible' (Durham and Kellner 2006, xiv); as such, ideology can be understood as not merely reflected in socio-cultural attitudes but also as a structuring agent. Media representation of hipsters has reinforced what Flowerdew and Richardson refer as an 'us versus them situation' (Flowerdew and Richardson 2017, 23); however, a salient reminder would be the Gramscian assertion that hegemony itself can be contested by counter-hegemonic forces (Durham and Kellner 2006, xv).

I use a 'multi-modal' social semiotic approach, involving a consideration of not only lexical but also 'visual and aural ... systems of signs' (Flowerdew and Richardson 2017, 21) to consider how these elements structure and perpetuate 'society's ideologies ... and

legitimise certain kinds of social practices' (Machin and Mayr 2012, 13). As this study interprets the ways in which social actors are classified, it marries semiotic analysis (Barthes 1977) with an analysis of rhetorical devices, which Aristotle refers to as 'modes of persuasion' (Berger 2016, 89). These include allusion, euphemism, irony and metaphor (Berger 2016, 96), and also, of course, hyperbole (Machin and Mayr 2012, 101). Furthermore, van Leeuwen's method of identifying 'collectivisation' through 'genericisation' (van Leeuwen 1996 Machin and Mayr 2012, 50), which relates to 'homogenised' representation in the form of 'stereotypical representations of dress, hairstyle and grooming, and ... often exaggerated features' (Machin and Mayr 2012, 62), assists to identify collectivised stigmatisation through an index of 'attributes ... ideas and values communicated by objects' (ibid.) and reveals sentiments and judgements concerning hipster taste. The research and theme of this study are informed by the interdisciplinary approach employed in cultural studies. This field takes a 'social constructionist' perspective (Jorgensen and Phillips 2002, 4), which facilitates an interpretative approach in which 'the relationship between data and concepts is fundamentally open' (Gunter 2000, 9), and as Chris Barker summarises, 'cultural studies does not speak with one voice' (Barker 2012, 4).

The study draws on a range of mainstream media in digital form, websites, social media and YouTube, within the prescribed period. These contain explicit reference to hipsterism or allusions to it through established 'identity indexicals', signs that connote a particular demographic (Maly and Varis 2016). They are also identifiably British, or are cited by British media as relevant, and focus on London. Regarding moving image, again, the material is British and includes television documentary with explicit reference to hipsterism, and also television and online comedy from various genres. Two television satires, the piloted Shoreditch Twat TV (2002), and Nathan Barley (2005), only available online and both from outside the period in question, are included on the grounds that both have subsequently been cited in the media as representations of hipsterism, despite the term not having entered the public lexicon in the United Kingdom when they were broadcast. Such subsequent associations are significant as they highlight the broad application of 'hipster' to describe a type whose appearance may not correspond to any of the identity indexicals recognised in the period of study but who nevertheless qualifies for reasons of unappealing demeanour or sartorial absurdity. Due to the ephemeral nature of social media, some content has been moved or deleted since my research. One significant source, the blog HackneyHipsterHate can now only be accessed by signing into Tumble and no longer contains images. Another, the mockumentary, Dalston Superstars (2011), created by Vice UK, features the personal and professional dramas of a group of spectacularly dysfunctional and untalented millennials sharing a Hackney flat. Four episodes and several exposés were run but later removed, with only two of the latter now accessible on Youtube.

Definitions

The current use of the term 'hipster' emerged at an imprecise point around the millennium in the United States. Originally used to describe members of the post-war African-American counterculture outlined by Anatole Broyard (1948), and subsequently in an analogous 'white' application by Norman Mailer in 1957 (Mailer 1970), the hipster has now come to represent an abiding stock character on the contemporary

global stage, and one that has become indivisible with a range of cultural shifts in material culture. While the term is proposed, and applied, by the media as an identity marker, it is seldom claimed. This form of labelling operates as the converse, almost antithesis, of Althusser's (1971) notion of interpellation and merely reinforces a disassociation for those to whom the label is applied. Nevertheless, the term is widely understood as something that exists in a recognisable form, and in terms of discourse the concept of hipsterism has moved from the niche to the mainstream. However, it is this very ubiquity, and the broad adoption of so many of its supposedly defining features within the mainstream, that leads to the credibility of the moniker itself being questioned. A generalised, woolly denotation is common to, and perhaps expected from, the media; however, this lack of definitional clarity is shared by the academic literature, which leads to proposed connotations, then classification and ultimately to cultural signification.

In the United Kingdom the term 'hipster', with its present connotations, was adopted later that in the United States; however, by 2013, as journalist, Karen Dacre, points out, it had been 'bandied about' indiscriminately (Dacre 2013), and had become established as a ready moniker for not only a range of lifestyle and sartorial choices but also particular forms of social interaction. These choices were informed by a mind-set and were exemplars of wider socio-economic developments. In terms of establishing a discourse in the British media about the causes and effects of hipsterism, seminal denunciations by Canadian pundit, Douglas Haddow, and also by New York cultural critic and publisher, Mark Greif, are repeatedly cited by the British media as theoretically credible justifications for hipster-bashing, despite the first being a short article in Adbusters, in which Haddow, decrying the vacuity and alienation of hipsters, accuses them, with some hyperbole, as 'representing the end of civilization' (Haddow 2008). Greif extends this train of thought, as editor and contributor to What Was The Hipster (Greif, Ross and Tortorici 2010) and also in media variations of it (Greif 2010a, 2010b). Firstly, they provide a foundational, collective character flaw for hipsters: inauthenticity. This is cited subsequently at all levels in the media. Secondly, despite the specifically North American context of both, they are taken as universally representative examples. Certain similarities between London and New York exist in terms of multicultural composition, socio-economic issues and creative and financial dominance, but it would be an error to read them as merely mirror images of the other.

Changing employment patterns and socio-cultural developments have led to an influx of a 'creative class' (Florida 2014), in Brooklyn and Hackney, and this in turn has produced 'cultural clusters' (Mommaas 2004) of young professionals, many of whom originate from outside these boroughs, and whose presence has accelerated gentrification processes that remain contentious. Not only have rents and property prices risen, creating a housing crisis but transformations in retail and leisure outlets means the very character of these urban areas has been transformed. Hipsters, who provide the recognisable embodiment of this creative class, are therefore characterised as identifiable interlopers who do not really belong, and as such are inauthentic residents. The fact that many belong to the precariat does not provide them working class credentials, but only reinforces allegations of affecting impecuniousness; another form of inauthenticity. Nevertheless, these boroughs are not simply duplicates of one another, and cultural and political histories, ethnic dynamics and local governance are quite

distinct. Similarities in lifestyle and consumption do not constitute global uniformity and simply superimposing American experiences and contexts onto British ones ignores the transnational nature of hipsterism (Maly and Varis 2015). An example of this is Greif's claim that trucker caps and 'wife beaters', connote 'the violence, instinctiveness and rebelliousness of lower-middle-class suburban or country whites' (Greif, Ross and Tortorici 2010, 10), has no meaning in a British context in which class, its socio-cultural implications and its visual signifiers are read differently.

Categorisation

The various conceptualisations of hipsterism reflect the 'opaque and fluid' nature of it (Maly and Varis 2016, 637). Though often classified as a subculture by media of all types, Bennett points out, subculture has become 'little more than a convenient "catchall" phrase for any aspect of social life in which young people, style and music intersect' (Bennett 1999, 599). However, this has impacted on its reception; the early conception of a subculture as 'heroic' and 'revolutionary' (Hebdige 1979; Hall and Jefferson 1993) has established credentials that resonate with pundits, particularly male critics, who insist that a lack of ideological zeal encapsulates a fundamental lack of anything meaningful in hipsterism.

Regarding subcultural identity, some sense of affiliation is surely a prerequisite, and there is hardly any evidence of this amongst those identified as hipsters. In fact, accusations of hipsterism are usually met with fierce denial. In relation to this, a significant paradox is unexplored by the media: namely, we live in an era in which self-identification, regarding sex, gender, class or ethnicity, is taken extremely seriously, and there is a widely-held, and increasingly officially-sanctioned belief that claims to identifications and affiliations are an individual's inalienable right. Therefore, for the media to assign an identity, with no regard to the recipient's agency, not only goes against the grain of cultural sensitivity, it also assumes the role of 'moral entrepreneur' (Becker 1964), and one that reifies a stereotype of its own invention.

However, in order to understand hipsterism beyond the aggregated sum of disconnected individuals, alternatives to subculture should be considered. Maffesoli's notion of the 'neo-tribe' (Maffesoli 1996), as proposed through Bennett goes some way to offering a practicable conception of the fluid collective described as hipsterism (Bennett 1999). This neo-tribe, which acts as a 'sociality,' an 'organic structure,' (ibid.) offers, according to Schiermer, a plausible typology as this is really an amalgamation of groups that share, or are perceived to share, a certain approach to style and lifestyle (Schiermer 2014). In relation to these perceptions, certain aspects seen as common to diverse forms of hipsterism evoke what Maffesoli refers to as Stimmung (atmosphere), as this concept provides a means by which interaction between social micro-groups 'is expressed by a succession of ambiences, feelings and emotions' (Maffesoli 1996, 11). Media identification is firmly based on consumption patterns and their embodiment in dress and grooming. Similarly, this can be understood in Shields's reference to lifestyle that draws upon both Weber's 'affective groupings' (1978 in Shields 1992, 13) and Simmel's 'sociations' (1950 in Shields 1992, 14), which 'emerge through the medium of shared symbolic codes of stylized behaviour, adornment, taste and habitus' (Bourdieu 1971 in Shields 1992).

Authenticity

As Cobb contends, we are 'surrounded by the rhetoric of authenticity' (Cobb 2014, 2). From the marketing of goods in 'modern consumer culture' (Filitz and Saris 2015, 5) to the assurance of its qualifying properties for those in authority, authenticity is an 'ideal or exemplar' and also a 'marker of status' in late modernity (Vannini and Williams 2009, 4). From a Romantic philosophical perspective, Rousseau binds authenticity to the notion of subjectivity, the individual and uniqueness, and his belief that not only do humans have the capacity to show difference, but indeed should show this, resonates today (Varga 2012, 21). Trilling identifies the transformation of sincerity as a 'moral ideal' for social performance and the public good 'into the ideal of authenticity with the evolution of modernity' (Trilling 1972 cited in Varga 2012, 16). The notion of being true to oneself, informed by 'sincerity for its own sake (Ferreira 1993 cited in Varga 2012, 16) binds authenticity to honesty and suggests a purity of spirit, the binary opposite of which is an essence contaminated by inauthenticity. Relevant too, is a twopronged conception of authenticity in late modernity in which Taylor identifies both a romantic sensibility, which favours 'an essentialist cultural context turning objects into what is considered traditional' and also, conversely, revolutionary fervour, as the authentic can be located 'from within avant-garde culture' (Taylor 1991, 18). This dichotomy is echoed by Keightley in his analysis of authenticity in rock music, in which he states that 'romantic authenticity emphasises the rural, while Modernist authenticity values the urban' (Keightley 2001, 138), and applied by Michael in her study of taste, consumption and hipster identity (Michael 2015). These distinct approaches symbolise metaphors of nostalgia on one hand and progression on the other. What both have in common is a notion of a corrupting 'other' that disrupts authenticity; in the first instance this is represented by material simulacra and in the second by that which fraudulently claims radical credentials. In both cases, an accusation of inauthenticity transforms the object in question into a meritless parody of the genuine.

Representation and Stereotyping

Sobel's very obvious point that lifestyles are 'recognisable' (Sobel 1981 in Chaney 1994, 11) is fundamental to the representation of hipsters; however, at a time of enormous social and demographic change in what is seen as the heartland of hipsterism, East London, 'new forms of distinction are being continually elaborated'; however, these are met, at best, with grudging respect in terms of culinary innovations and at worst with 'repugnance' in the case of manner and appearance (Chaney 1994, 6). For the most part, derision appears to be the rationale behind a satirical representation. For the media, stereotyping is an established, easy and popular means by which particular demographics can be organised into beneficial commodities: it sells copy. Strategic use of stereotyping also maintains status and what all forms of media require is 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1984, 1993) in order to remain relevant.

Dyer refers to Klapp's distinction between the definition given to 'social groups' as belonging, and stereotypes 'as those who do not belong' (Klapp 1962 in Dyer 2015, 14). Goffman's identification of stigma, triggered by prejudices aroused by perceived flaws in character and appearance and also tribal affiliation, is pertinent. Portrayals of male hipsters, via rhetorical devices and powerfully connotative imagery, offer stereotypical and 'discrediting' (Goffman 1963, 3) representations that suggest that cultural attitudes

regarding conceptions of masculinity in appearance and manner have not progressed as far as it is claimed, ironically, by a wide range of media.

One reason, perhaps, that the stereotyping of male hipsters is so ubiquitous is because it centres on a mythical other and is largely dependent on either fictional characters or anonymous members of the public, both of which are often recycled and passed between different media formats. Not only do stereotypes 'distort ways in which social groups are characterised' (Pickering 1995, 691), but it is imperative that they do so. There is clearly a logic in the rhetorical need to 'proclaim' as 'effectiveness ... resides in the way they invoke a consensus' (Dyer 2013, 14). This highlights the essential problem with stereotyping, which is not in the reductive and generalised grouping of people but rather in the possible motives for doing so; furthermore, in whose interests is this being done? Berger and Luckmann's analysis of 'the social construction of reality' (Berger and Luckmann 2013, 12) returns us to the reality that media representations are 'grounded in social power' (ibid.), and one that helps naturalise the reproduction of certain views.

While certain features, such as facial hair and skinny jeans, are routinely described as hipster indexical markers, the epithet is also applied to a range of other styles and the arbitrary nature of dress and grooming signifiers are highlighted in media representation. The hipster becomes an abstraction that is superimposed onto whoever conforms to a selected exemplar of urban myth. Sophy Bot describes the hipster 'as elusive as a unicorn yet as common as an ant' (Bot 2012, 151) and social commentator, Chris Mandle, questions whether 'hipsters really exist ... it's smoke and mirrors' (Mandle 2014). Hipsterism is identified in different guises: in a slavish adherence to craft and sustainability, but also, conversely, in tasteless exhibitions of kitsch and artificiality. It is recognised in the neo-Victorian paterfamilias beard and the manicured ruggedness of the lumbersexual. It is identified in a range of normcore and adaptations of historical subcultural styling, expressed by the body-conscious combo of skinny jeans and deep V 'T' shirt, in a range of elaborate clubwear, and also, of course, in any form of androgyny. In both mainstream and social media this promiscuous inventory is expressed explicitly through the combination of imagery and the nomenclature 'hipster', and also implicitly in visual and written texts that emphasise associative traits, such as the 'Top Chumps' caricatures, on the defunct website Wepwecan, of which only two can now be accessed on Vice UK (Vice 2018). However, what links these diverse examples is the common factor of perceived pretentiousness. While different, they are all ridiculous because they are overly constructed, and so contrived.

It's All About Men

The emphasis on male expression is brought into sharp focus in the BBC4 documentary *The Hipster Handbook* (2016), fronted by seasoned social commentator, Peter York. Presented as an ostensibly objective, retrospective account of hipsterism, it nonetheless explores the rise of the phenomenon through a range of hackneyed identity markers and consumption habits, drawing on a range of pundits from academia, media and fashion. Two aspects of the documentary are salient: the blurring of distinctions between London and New York and the almost total reliance on men as the embodiment of hipsterism. Thirteen minutes into the commentary, York reassures the viewer that hipster women exist before immediately returning to men for the remaining forty-seven minutes.

The British media has a complicated relationship with men's fashion and the men who follow it. Both tradition and innovation, as two distinct sartorial approaches, are respected; however, men need to qualify convincingly for membership of either camp. As outlined by Varga, this corresponds to a Hegelian sense of sincerity, itself a perpetuation of a classical conception, which is 'not essentially a personal but rather a social virtue' (Varga 2012, 15). When fashion, particularly men's fashion, moves too far from an accredited form or function, it loses its sincerity and virtue. The perceived irony and playfulness of certain styles associated with hipsters can only act to discredit it (see Figure 1. below). In the *Spectator*, Harry Mount laments 'the knowing irony that's so trying ... they think they look good, clever, amusing. They end up being completely derivative' and he concludes that 'it's bohemianism without the dirt' (Mount 2014).



Fig.1. Self Portrait in a Bowler Hat, source: Peral 2015.

In relation to inauthenticity, masculinity itself is represented as dubious when in hipster form. In both social and mainstream media, associations drawn between artifice with unmanliness cast hipsters as inauthentically masculine. Ferrier (2014) cites Boston-based blogger, Luke O'Neil, a selfconfessed hipster, and therefore a rare case. Aside from highlighting the indiscriminate application of the term 'hipster', O'Neil notes astutely that much of the discourse on men comes from men, which brings to mind Demetriou's (2001) notion of 'internal masculinity' through which an 'ascendancy' is maintained by certain men over others. This suggests lingering male discomfort about the

enactment of gender by hipsters, who appear 'in a way very feminised, stereotypically speaking ... caring about how you look at all in the first place, even if it's caring to look intentionally gross' (O'Neil 2013). This discomfort suggests a male insecurity, which is manifested according to specific temporal and cultural contexts, and which is fed by the very effort involved in hipsterist presentation; this effort is conflated with artifice, and as such undermines notions of what is deemed normative masculinity.

A great deal has been written about the 'ridiculous clothes, and ... ridiculous facial hair' of male hipsterism (Hackney Hipster Hate, 2010). Moustaches, and the more common beard, were denounced the moment they were noticed. Perceived by many as signifiers of a mind-set, rather than simply fashion, journalist Alex Proud, sums up the opposition: 'What I hate more than Shoreditch itself is the *idea* of Shoreditch ... I hate the stupid beards and skinny jeans' (Proud 2014). However, these two signifiers of hipsterism have

had a major impact on how men choose to present themselves. Regarding beards, the close advent of the gay bear and the hipster, often one and the same in East London, is worth noting as both have appropriated a metaphor of orthodox masculinity (Anderson 2012) (see Figure 2 below). In so doing they have subverted preconceptions of the relationship between gender and taste and contributed to a more 'hybridized masculinity' (Beynon 2000, 6), which is increasing evident in popular and material culture.



Fig. 2. Taking in the Scene, source: Peral 2016.

Hyperbole and Humour

Two satires repeatedly mentioned in recent media as early examples of British hipsterism are *Shoreditch Twat TV* (2002) and *Nathan Barley* (2005). These take the emerging, and subsequently labelled, 'flat white economy' (McWilliams 2015), which has provided considerable employment and creative opportunities in East London, as the basis on which to lambast a perceived cultural fatuity. These sources are cited as providing an adequate context for hipsterism after 2010, with representations of absurdity, pretentiousness, superficiality and anti-social insularity, but both are heavily stylised and exaggerated in the tradition of British satire that can be traced back to

eighteenth-century caricature. Characters in neither bear any stylistic resemblance to what subsequently emerged in East London and then elsewhere in the United Kingdom; however, the eponymous Nathan Barley is hailed as the original hipster, a term never applied in the programme itself, on the basis of his self-delusion and general awfulness.

In terms of representation, hipster bricolage is exaggerated to the level of pantomime for full comic effect. In the TV farce Toast of London, centred on the antics of failed actors, styling and characterisation draws heavily on an established British tradition of caricature and social satire and also post-modern irony. Costumes chosen to represent hipsterism in the form of Danny Bear and Clem Fandango are deliberately hyperbolised (Berry and Matthews, 2012-2015). These parodies of the creative class, who run a voiceover studio, resemble the male characters in the earlier, Shoreditch Twat TV (2002) and Nathan Barley (2005), and function as signifiers of absurdity, styled in a selection of bizarrely eclectic, almost dada, costumes. Less extreme but similarly facile is Barney Lumsden in Twenty Twelve (Morton 2011-12) and WIA (Morton 2014), which satirise respectively the London Olympics and the BBC. This character, the 'Go-To Guy' from PR company, 'Perfect Curve: Digital Strategy', communicates through clichéd soundbites, the idiocy of which is reinforced by his white-man afro and nouveau-fogey styling. This is mirrored by Siobhan, his boss, who holds forth in a contemporary flat tone on themes that parody the supposed concerns of East London's 'flat white culture' (McWilliams 2015), while displaying a total ignorance of anything outside the latest fads in fashion or popular culture. Interestingly, unlike Barney, she is styled in contemporary high fashion as opposed to a parody of it, which highlights a gendered differentiation in the visual representation of hipsterism. What all these portrayals have in common, beyond parody, is a conflation of stupidity and superficiality with stylistic artifice.

It is precisely by maintaining a look that requires effort, by trying hard, that hipster men have renegotiated masculinity, and as that labelled 'hipster' comes in a variety of forms, this renegotiation also comes on different levels. Few mainstream journalists would risk professional suicide with outright homophobia, but as Fox posits, 'the insult of 'pretentious' is deployed as an insidious euphemism for ... 'effeminacy' or 'dandyism' (Fox 2016, 130) which acts as the more coded insult. The anonymity of social media, of course, allows for a more explicit reaction and on Hackney Hipster Hate, Toastfinger refers to male hipsters as 'a bunch of pretentious cock-ends, mincing about in their offensive dandy-rags' (Hackney Hipster Hate 2010). While this does not explicitly refer to being gay, it suggests a form of 'subordinated masculinity' combined with an inversion 'marginal sexuality' (Connell 2005, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) that connotes an elitist and emasculated 'other'. This reflects an old prejudice that reads attempts at sophistication as suspect on several levels. Fox contends that 'we smell pretentiousness when we believe something is trying to stay out of reach from us' (Fox 2016, 111) and in contemporary Britain, being perceived as 'try hards' (Hackney Hipster Hate 2010) is interpreted as a form of emasculation produced by effort, of being 'poncey' and the antithesis of a 'regular bloke.' Hipsterism seems to jar with a Nineties Laddism that is still very evident. Those who offer a more political critique decry a superficiality and materialism that signifies inauthenticity from a more radical perspective (Keightley 2001). Those with a more conservative agenda interpret experimentation as foolish and immature and thus indicative of an arrested cultural

development that is symptomatic of contemporary society. However, as Fox observes, 'claims to ordinariness and salt-of-the-earth virtue ... are themselves pretentious' (Fox 2016, 58).

Representations of hipsterism reveal it as selectively nostalgic in spirit, and although not overtly ideological, it draws on a spectrum of countercultural influences. Its various manifestations can be defined, if rather imprecisely, as postmodern: eclectic, experimental and often retro. Both self-consciously playful and unconventional, it stands outside the perimeters of established taste, drawing on the past, while introducing novel ways of presentation. In this sense, it can be both extremely familiar in spirit, as it combines references to bohemian dress from a number of previous decades, but also innovative as it rearticulates aesthetics through *bricolage*. As such, it offers an 'oppositional' aesthetic (Wilson 2003, 184) and follows an art-school aesthetic and tradition that it playfully referential.

Most media reaction would suggest that these reinterpretations of past styles are generally not accepted as honest forms of bricolage, in contrast to those supposedly heroic subcultures. Rather, they are dismissed as empty mimetic gestures that reveal, through their shallow consumption of authenticity, an intensification of inauthenticity (Greif 2010, Kinzey 2012). As Alex Miller, editor of Vice UK points out, 'hipster has simply become a word which means the opposite of authentic' (Ferrier 2014). This reading conceptualises appropriation as blind imitation. Consumption itself is regularly conflated with a lack of ideological commitment and is therefore understood as a conscious abjuring of radical engagement with class struggle, which compounds accusations of 'play acting' (York 2016), and of a cynical parodying of 'heroic' precursors, which, naturally, is cited as evidence of inauthenticity. However, Schiermer contends that 'new phenomenologies and sensibilities' have been made possible with hipsterism and that authenticity cannot be reduced to 'mere subcultural rhetoric' (Schiermer 2014, 167); he interprets the adoption of past styles as a sincere attachment to particular facets of cultural expression and views the fusion of stylistic influences and reinterpretation of bourgeois 'emblems' and working-class kitsch as an expression of 'personal creative practice' (ibid. 169). Similarly, the hipsterist use of irony is more than mere 'Bourdieuian degout' (Schiermer 2014, 179) and is both a redemptive and imaginative challenge to notions of good taste; rather than simply representing the clichéd preoccupation of consumerist 'lemmings,' (Mount 2014), it can be read as an exploratory 'reaction to overt but unconscious imitation' (Schiermer, 179). This resonates with Sontag's conceptualisation of camp, in which she claims that 'taste has no system and no proofs' (Sontag 1964, 1) and that 'an object prized by camp ... arouses a necessary sympathy' (Sontag 1964, 8). It allows us to look at objects and aesthetics from other perspectives. In relation to that, Schiermer presents 'irony as a form of collective enjoyment of "failed objects" (Schiermer 2014, 179).

Regarding stereotyping, depicting men as camp is an established means by which to undermine their credibility as men. Depictions of effeminacy and idiocy combined feature prominently in the video *Being a Dickhead's Cool* (Dangor and Riley 2010). In this example of content recycling, a melange of imagery borrowed from a range of sources, including the blog *HackneyHipsterHate*, is presented in a flashing staccato format. An indiscriminate range of styles is used to refer to the title, and these include examples of

high fashion but also forms of anti-fashion and those unrelated to hipsterism. This use of random theatricality is clearly intended to parody and in so doing it returns, again, to the premise that hipsterism is dependent on artifice and bad taste. Clearly, this video is intended to stereotype through a use of visual hyperbole and rejects any notion of the relative nature of taste (Bourdieu 1984), but this approach is also taken in apparently more measured media texts. Hipsters are represented as contrived in manner and style but this ignores the benefits of experimentation as an essential element for creativity and indeed the contention that 'bad taste is phenomenologically intriguing' (Schiermer 2014, 173).



Fig. 3. All Buttoned Up, source: Gregor Clemens-Dobschutz 2015.

Despite many accusations of 'collective conformity' by the media (Zolfagharifard and Woollaston 2015), media coverage itself proposes a broad vestiary spectrum, which includes both the formal and the ludic. This playfulness is often conflated with the ludicrous, but can also be defended as a vital component in any cultural and aesthetic

evolution, and I would concur that 'fashion is culturally omnivorous and dilettantish' (Fox 2016, 77) (see Figure 3.). On the other end of the stylistic spectrum, hipsterism can also express an aversion to ostentatious, branded fashion through an emphasis on simplicity. The *Top Chump* cartoon entitled 'The Art Collective Look' (Vice 2018) captures a normcore aesthetic, which far from eclipsing hipsterism, as claimed by some, is in fact an essential component of it (see Figure 4.).



Fig. 4. Keeping it Simple, source: Gregor Clemens-Dobschutz 2014.

Class, Anti-sociality and Neo-liberalism

Hipsters are often identified as a young demographic, and their supposed antisocial behaviour in the form of both aloofness and inconsiderate hedonism is a major factor in attacks on them via social media. Certain sources refer to their styling itself as antisocial. Furthermore, being inconsiderate is presented as symptomatic of an elitism and class disdain that is bound up with gentrification. Hipsters are represented as 'posh' – a

serious indictment in contemporary Britain. On social media variations of this include, in the words of blogger *Raymanorac* 'middle-class dickheads,' 'trustafarian posers' and 'double-barrel(sic) twats' (Hackney Hipster Hate 2010). The calumnious association between middle-class interlopers and socially damaging gentrification is repeatedly averred; as Richard Godwin notes 'in Dalston or Brixton, the mere act of buying a fancy coffee is sometimes depicted as an act of blundering white supremacy' (Godwin 2014). Wessendorf's study of community relations in multi-cultural Hackney identifies two demographics perceived as resistant to 'an ethos of mixing': Orthodox Jews and hipsters, who she defines as 'young, mostly middle-class people who emphasise fashion and style and have only recently moved into the area' (Wessendorf 2013, 408). This lends some credence to accusations of insensitivity but the breadth of her own definition of hipster also allows for the stereotyping of anyone approximating an interpretation of this category. As Chaney notes, 'lifestyles are patterns of action that differentiate people' (Chaney 1996. 4), and the media often reads this distinctiveness as superiority, and thereby conflates hipsterism with socio-cultural arrogance.

In September 2015, the anarchist group Class War organised a demonstration, advertised as the third Fuck Parade, on Facebook to protest, with torches, pig's heads and effigies, against a process of gentrification in Shoreditch, which they claimed was causing local communities to be 'ripped apart' (Khomaini and Hallyday 2015). Several premises were attacked but the only one to receive coverage in the media was the Cereal Killer Café run by two Irish brothers, Gary and Alan Keery, who found themselves and their customers under siege by a chanting crowd who daubed 'scum' on the window, which they then attempted to break. The identification of the brothers as quintessential hipsters was central to the media coverage. This was based not only on the brothers sporting full beards, occasionally man-buns, and a range of normcore plaid shirts, but also the specialist nature of their business: the brothers sold bowls of artisanal cereal for £3.20, and many reports, while voicing sympathy for the attack, also highlighted this as emblematic of niche forms hipsterism that are considered elitist and so provocative.

The accusation of elitism features prominently in a range of literature that considers the socio-economic significance of hipsterism (Greif, Ross and Tortorici 2010, Kinzey 2012, Zukin 2011). This American literature refers explicitly to hipsters as the embodiment of neo-liberal agendas that have altered the demographic nature of Brooklyn, to name one example, by replacing the indigenous white working class and people of colour in what is classed as act of social cleansing with intersectional significance. This accusation is also applied to British context in London, but Hugo Rifkind highlights the inherent dangers of making such easy correlations when he refers to hipsters as 'the modern canaries of urban gentrification' (Rifkind 2016). Hubbard (2016) is justified in cautioning against an undiscriminating adoption of a 'hipster led model' of gentrification in retail space by developers and councils (Hubbard 2016, 5) and consideration of differentials in cultural capital and consumer needs should be taken into account. However, to claim, on the basis of assumed lifestyle choices, that people who conform to a particular ideal type are responsible, either directly or indirectly, for social cleansing not only represents stigmatisation, but it also reflects an inability, or unwillingness to understand the context in which Londoners of all types operated during the period of this study. Clearly, certain individuals took advantage of the housing shortage and the rapid inflation of house prices that characterised this period; however, to lay the blame solely at the feet of hipsters completely ignores the essential role that national and local governance played in the facilitation of neo-liberal agendas and the failure to invest properly in deprived areas.

Conclusion

I conclude with several points. Firstly, from the media texts analysed in this study it is clear that hipsters have become stock characters in late modernity and are popularly acknowledged as corresponding to media representation. However, I would contend that this representation is a cultural construct that draws selectively on particular phenomena in lifestyle and consumption habits in order to assemble a twenty-first century Golem onto which a range of prejudices, anxieties and suspicions can be projected. The nuances of this demographic have proved difficult to identify, which has resulted in a catch-all label being applied, but not claimed, and then consolidated into an established stereotype.

Secondly, although this study focuses on negative representation, which dominates discourse on the subject, a close reading of media content reveals tonal dissonance between the established media, television and social media. This, though unsurprising in itself, also uncovers a varied and nuanced reception to hipsterism. The dominant assumption in the established press that cultural responses are negative, though on a sliding scale of opprobrium, is not uniformly borne out by the content itself, and more ambivalent reaction exists. However, the *supposition* of a negative discourse acts to substantiate this discourse, and by emphasising and repeating a litany of supposedly unappealing characteristics, the media then cements them. In social media, while there is very little identification as hipsters, assumptions and prejudices are challenged; however, discourse by bloggers is not only heavily gendered, it is also generally negative.

Thirdly, the conflation of hipster with men brings attitudes and responses to masculinity to the fore. The male hipster is the embodiment of cultural change in taste, and as with many such examples, these changes have been met with suspicion. Regarding appearance, much of the spirit, if not the detail of hipster style, has been evident throughout post-modernity: experimentation with normative gender roles, eclectic nostalgia and manifestations of subcultural capital that challenge established notions of taste. What is new, however, is an assumption that this reflects mere consumerism, which is an accusation that conveniently distracts from the rampant consumption firmly entrenched in society as a whole, and its vital role in the British economy. In no sense should this be read of an endorsement of the status quo, but these factors need to be recognised. While British attitudes to gender have changed considerably in recent decades, certain cultural beliefs persist and the notion that a man constructs an identity through experimentation not driven by 'deeper' convictions or traditional loyalties, such as sport or ideology, continues to render him both pretentious and insincere for many. Such a poseur is, by definition, inauthentic, and an accusation of privilege can only compound this inauthenticity. The geographical environment in which hipsters supposedly flourish is repeatedly cited as the terrain where socio-cultural differentials, highlighted by a hipster presence, exacerbate social inequality, and this is a gross simplification of socio-economic responsibilities.

Finally, the mainstream adoption of a wide range of styles and practices has had a profound effect on menswear and male grooming; identity indexicals such as beards and skinny jeans, originally connotative of hipsters, have been adopted by an extremely wide demographic that exists far beyond the cultural clusters in Hackney. While the aesthetic qualities of either of these examples is clearly open to interpretation, these and other features at least contribute to a more hybridised form of masculinity, which I would contend is ultimately socially and culturally beneficial. Furthermore, outside fashion, other areas of material culture have also benefited from the 'hipster hype'. While this is precisely the argument provided by detractors as evidence of shallow consumerism and inauthenticity, this does not constitute any greater level of consumption; it merely comprises one that is distinct and one which offers alternatives to mass consumption.

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Article

Commodifying Intimacy in 'Hard Times'

A Hardcore Ethnography of a Luxury Brothel

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Abstract This paper is a methodological reflection on an ongoing covert ethnography I have been undertaking in a luxury brothel in Madrid, Spain. By accident, this study became a research project when I was employed by the manager to review porn forums offering feedback on the women that worked there and taught English to him. For 18 months now, I have worked in the brothel a couple of nights a week doing these duties and have come to know the manager's closest friends and family, the women who work there and the security staff. The context for the work is the expansion of the sex industry in an era of consumer society and self-gratification coupled with austerity politics which has disproportionately affected the opportunities for women in the formal labour market thus catapulting many into precarious situations in which selling sex becomes an option. This has crudely mixed with cultural change in Spain in the wake of increased neoliberal economics which have hollowed out notions of family, tradition and intimacy.

Keywords prostitution, brothel, covert ethnography, socio-economic bondage, commercial bondage

I drive twelve kilometres to a rich neighbourhood outside of Madrid; park up the road from the busy venue. I walk past the cordoned roads and the horses being groomed outside, amble into the complex past a guard and a car barrier and see stables, nice cars, and lots of rich people in Polo shirts and branded clothing. It is a different world.

I continue to walk into this high life of Spanish society, past mobile shops selling horse commodities and fashion items, and into the Sports Café. Inside, children are monitored by mums while dads make important calls and fiddle around on mobile phones and laptops. At the bar, I wait and drink a coffee as in front of me push four ten-year old girls and each get out iPhones. I see no point in jostling but my jaw drops when they take ϵ 50 notes out of their pockets.

Some minutes later, Guillermo walks in, sweaty and tired. Outside is his wife, dressed, unsurprisingly, in designer clothing, smoking a cigarette and talking loudly on the phone; she impatiently side steps and tosses her bleach blond hair from side to side like the horses do with their tails. A thin girl with a long ponytail dressed in white jodhpurs and brown boots stands next to her. It is Guillermo's daughter Elena. She speaks good English as I shake her hand. 'So you are Mr English?' she says 'I have been looking forward to meeting you.'

We hang around, not really knowing what to do because as soon as Guillermo's wife finishes a call she starts another one. Guillermo just cannot get her attention. Eventually, he leaves her and walks up to the stables to see his other daughter and their horses. We walk over the small piles of

horse shit and head towards the well-kept stables in the corner of the arena. We walk to the end passing other horses which poke their heads out until we come to Guillermo's three horses and two ponies. The stables are well kept and outside each a young rider has his chair with his name and a curtain with the name of the horse. I meet his other daughter, a slightly taller twin. Her name is Maria. They are both 13 years old. As she strokes the horse, worth around ϵ 100,000, I meet the pony which is 19 years old and a former national champion too.

Guillermo and I walk back to the café and sit in the sun with his wife and her friend, Francesca, who is married to a rich man owning several yachts in Marbella. All around us, rich people sit and laugh as they drink beers and order tapas. Guillermo and I sit there a bit awkwardly at first as they don't speak English yet we continue our broken conversation about the horse competition. This is, after all, the national championship and the circuit is one of the hardest in Spain.

The weather continues to be hot and Guillermo gets a headache. As we move to the shade, the horse trainer, Mariano, comes over; he is a tall figure from Murcia with a shaved head and sunglasses. He sits behind us and tries to listen to the conversation and join in but his English is too poor. Somehow we get on to talk about women at which point Guillermo sees a side funny to his own jokes about having sex with other women. Mariano joins in and laughs before Guillermo complements him on his young girlfriend (who is only 20 and he is 34) before Mariano says that she is angry with him. There is an awkward moment when they seem to concur that the best way to treat a woman is to 'machacarla' (batter/crush her) and make her believe that she is always wrong about things. Guillermo and Mariano laugh again and I laugh along.

We walk off to get some food before Guillermo's daughter competes. We start to talk about hotel raids and it turns out that at 5pm the Valencia hotel got a phone call saying there was an inspection from the tax office. Guillermo had just arrived in Sevilla, so he had to drive four hours back to Valencia to answer their queries. Everything was in order, I am a professional' he concludes. There was no real problem, I did my homework before they came unlike some people,' he says as he spits bits of salad out of his mouth. I was there until 4am in the morning but they couldn't find anything to fine me with. They asked me to open the safe and it had $\[Elling \]$ 5,000 in I had accounted for,' he adds.

We finish the food and watch Guillermo's daughter come third in the championship; the women then leave for the break. I accompany Guillermo to congratulate his daughter. He confesses that he is 'fed up' with his wife who criticises him for what he spends his money on while he says nothing about what she spends it on. On top of this, he says she did not have sex with him for the last two months. I shrug my shoulders and show sympathy while putting my arm around him. He smiles, returns the arm hug and says 'mejor te zumbas lo que puedas y ya esta' (best just fuck as much as you can and that's it). We come back to the stables where we meet Maitre, Mariano's young girlfriend. She plays around with her phone and perks up when Guillermo says 'this is Mr English' and she looks down below her glasses. 'You are Mr English? You are famous here' [Field notes].

⁴⁹ In this context, 'machacar' refers to psychological damage but can also mean physical damage.

These field notes were taken only recently during my ongoing study on prostitution in Madrid. They reflect a relationship I have managed to covertly develop with Guilermo, the owner of three brothels, or as he calls them 'luxury hotels' ('hotel' hereafter). This earns him significant amounts of money: around €50,000 a week, which is why we are mixing with the upper echelons of Spanish society in a posh neighbourhood. The notes also reflect how Mr English, my alter ego, fits in with this social scenery of wealth and sexism. However, it is not all glitz and glamour nor is the role I play as 'Mr English' particularly easy or comfortable.

Since June 2016, I have been working covertly in one of Guillermo's hotels reviewing porn forums and teaching English. How did I come to do this? To cut a long story short, after moving to Spain in the summer of 2013 to take up a position in a university to develop their research profile, I was lumbered with significant teaching and administration duties that almost killed my research career. In the summer of 2015, I reduced my hours and signed a part time contract to be able to find other ways of earning money and undertake research. One of the ways in which I complemented my wage was to teach English.

I am not a qualified English teacher nor do I know how to teach English. However, in Spain, anyone English is seen as having an automatic ability to teach the language. I started by giving conversational classes to former students for the Cambridge English exams and was quite successful in helping them pass. One of those students spoke to a group of younger people in another town nearby wanting to learn English as well. After a few months, the father of one of the children – who is also involved in Guillermo's 'hotel business' – recommended me to him. Guillermo called me shortly after and said he had some work for me and I agreed to meet him. The irony is that the first day I met him I had already spent the morning in an uninspiring conference about prostitution where the country's finest and most experienced researchers were talking about a ground-breaking tool which would act as a means of effectively intervening in reducing harm to prostitutes engaged in problematic drug use (Cruz Blanca 2016). At the same conference, I asked them about their experience with prostitutes in brothels and it turned out that not one had ever set a foot inside a brothel.

I have been privileged to say the least. In the time I have been working in the hotel, I have managed to develop a strong relationship with Guillermo to the point where we have met for lunch, had dinner out in some of Madrid's finest restaurants, and gone to bars and got drunk together. He has also allowed me to drive his Jeep and Porsche. I have been invited to the Christmas party, met with his family and close friends and associates and seem to have become part of his inner circle having also had access to the 'bunker' he has in the hotel where he keeps numerous different firearms and riot gear, and significant amounts of money. I have also been invited to go shooting with him along with the police and civil guard staff he informally employs as additional security and am privy to how he avoids fiscal attention from the state tax system.

While the study is ongoing, I feel it is unique to any insight I can find about this type of indoor prostitution given its relative difficulty in researching (Sanders 2006; Weitzer 2007). Previous international studies seem to have some harm reduction agenda and/or relate to a particular feminist standpoint (Farley 2005; Cusick 2006): there is nothing

wrong with this, however my study has accessed the ultra-masculine hierarchy of the hotel and its interactions and thus can offer a different perspective. Furthermore, most work is survey oriented; there is very little work which is qualitative and almost none which encompasses ethnographic approaches (Raphael and Shapiro 2004). This makes the approach unique, especially given the limited conceptions of sex work and the inability of criminological/sociological research in Spain to go beyond basic free-will choice explanations of deviance and crime (Briggs 2017; Briggs and Pérez Suárez 2016; Briggs and Monge, 2017).

At this stage in the study, this paper is a reflexive and methodological contribution discussing how I have come to manage my covert research (Winlow 2001; Treadwell and Garland 2011): Guillermo has no idea that I am a researcher, that I teach criminology or that I have even been documenting what is taking place in his hotel. This has meant that I have had to carefully manage aspects of my identity which contravene much of who I am and what I believe. Instead, I have adapted in many ways to who Guillermo is, how his circle of associates and collaborators operate, in line with security guards and domestic staff as well as the general cultural norms that govern the hotel space and the 40 or so women who work from it. At times, Guillermo has become cautious of me and at others I have almost been exposed for who I am. My main challenge in the future will be finding a way out of this. I begin by offering some context to prostitution in Spain.

Foreplay: Neoliberalism, the Sex Industry and the Commodification of Intimacy

While paying-for-sex is age-old, it was the international capitalist development in the 19th century which transformed prostitution into an international sex industry. The most recent period of globalisation and restructuring of capitalist production from the 1970s onwards has once again reshaped the sex industry as it has wreaked havoc with the lives of ordinary people. In developing countries, where this has been felt most, structural adjustment programmes imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) increased displacement in rural areas, unemployment in urban areas and led to wage cuts and increases in poverty (Verloo 2007). For example, in new production zones of South East Asia transnational corporations ride roughshod over minimum wage and health and safety laws, leaving women working in precarious conditions which is why the booming sex industry has come to fill the gap left by wages paid below subsistence levels or the lack of any secure, paid employment (Coy 2016).

This has had a profound impact on gender inequality. Neoliberal policies have therefore produced a huge polarisation between super rich elites and the marginalised and desperately poor, many of whom are women who face little choice but to choose by surviving in informal economies such as the sex industry (Briggs and Monge 2017). This is certainly the case in Spain where the same processes which caused the economic crisis of 2008 exacerbated the marginal experience of thousands of women in the country. In a shrinking formal economy, it is unsurprising that many of these women sidestep into markets like the sex industry as a way of maintaining themselves and their families.

While neoliberalism has in practice meant that more women have entered the labour market, many have also entered its informal equivalent. There is less time to maintain relationships, especially in families, hence many use their grandparents in the childrearing process. This is exacerbated in a diminishing economy where both parents need to work longer and harder to maintain a family. The family structure is under constant threat. In this context, couples or families have lost meaningful time together; work is prioritised and people obsess about pending tasks and, in the process, lose perspective on their relationships. Spare time is consequently folded into pointless updates on Facebook, never-ending garble in Whatsapp conversations and almost a kind of emergency, fast-track parenting style where people try and cram in time with their children hoping to make up for what they have lost (Young 2007).

Much of this is evident by simply observing everyday life in Spain but complemented further by quite invisible changes to the cultural way of life since the late 1970s. Neoliberalism has also interfered with the cultural dynamics of family relationships and religious traditions associated with family life. Spain is a predominantly catholic country and up until the death of Franco in 1976 these religious values were very much embedded in the idea that marriage translates into individual sacrifices made for the collective or, in this case, the family. Yet while the rhetoric around marriage continues to reflect catholic expectations, those conceptions seem to implode in these postmodern neoliberal times which canonise individualism. So there then appears a tension: family collectivity is imprinted on a mode of cultural life which increasingly reflects the social and commercial pressures to attend and satisfy individualistic needs and desires (Žižek 2009).

This transition toward individualisation provokes disinterest in communal life, in what is best for society, and even to some degree family, and starts to reflect the neoliberal mantras like 'look out for number one.' This has warped previous notions of solidarity in the context of family. People become detached, disorientated from their family obligations, and lean towards the satisfaction of their own needs (Bauman 2011). There is a whole commercial industry producing these 'desires' and dressing them up as 'needs'. We are sold ideas about what we deserve and what we should be getting as a proof of our participation in the 'good life' (Briggs 2013). In this context, sex becomes an additional 'experience' sold as a commodity. In Spain, the sex industry is worth €3,672 million each year (Ruiz 2014): Spain is Europe's highest consumer of sexual services (APRAMP 2015) where around one in five men have paid for sex (Meneses Falcón 2015). It should be unsurprising then that prostitution is considered 'normalised' (Miguel Álvarez 2012). Indeed, it has been estimated that around 100,000 women practice prostitution in Spain and that it is the number two country in Europe with 'clubs or hotels' where sex is sold (Meneses Falcón 2015).

Neoliberalism also endorses a notion of free-will thinking - a common misconception attached to the choice of the prostitute is that it is a rational and calculated decision: the idea that women - conscious of what it means to prostitute themselves - openly consent to selling sex services. This is reflected in Spanish penal law which prescribes prostitution as <u>alegal</u> (neither legal or illegal). Articles 182 to 192 of the Penal Code updated November 25th 1995 stipulates that prostitution is not illegal when it is practiced by an adult and in a voluntary capacity. In addition, prostitution agencies often preach liberal ideologies about how women make free choices by their own will to prostitute themselves and therefore must make similar cognitive evaluations to leave it. Having

spent 14 months with the women in my study, it seems clear that under no circumstances has the choice to prostitute been clear-cut or completely consensual and this is directly related to the necessity these women carry to support themselves as well as the demands of supporting a family. While their exploitation in the sex industry happens at varying degrees, the women in my study enter into these situations often having no job and/or having little other economic means to support a family (Briggs and Pérez Suárez 2016).

Though their autonomy clearly varies, essentially they are bound to prostitution as a form of *socio-economic bondage*: for many, it has become the only reasonable alternative given current austerity conditions in Spain. A shrinking formal economy has no room for women who are underqualified or lack formal education, especially during a time when temporary work is disappearing quickly (Requeña 2014). In this respect, objective circumstances determine subjective experience (Žižek 2016) and this blurs the idea that governs personal choice of entering into prostitution. Likewise, the question as to why they cannot work themselves out of their marginality becomes pertinent. In this paper, the notion of *commercial bondage* is put forward to explain how and why these women struggle to escape the precariousness of their economic and social circumstances. This concept shows how they are obliged and oblige themselves to compete against each other for clients and this involves an investment in extravagant consumer lifestyles, erotic capital (Hakim 2010) and body capital. All this directly relates to how the hotel space and the macho management structure operate as a means of generating capital.

Mr English Enters the 'Luxury Hotel'

As the time approaches 6pm, I walk up to the smart property which for a hotel has immensely high walls. I push on the door and walk up the immaculate stairs and buzz to get in: this is not the 'hotel' I had suspected it was. I walk past a well-built Russian security guard called Vlad who looks as if he could knock me out in a second. I am shown through into the waiting room which is a kind of plush living room with its own bar; relaxing music plays in the background. A short attractive woman offers me any drink I desire before I ask for a beer. She closes the door and I wait for Guillermo.

The short attractive woman then returns after 10 minutes and leads me back to the reception where a few women in high heels fiddle around in two of their lockers behind the desk. They are heavily made up as they hand over a fistful of cash to Guillermo who hands it to the receptionist. They then disappear as we sit in the back-office area nestled behind the reception and start to talk while the intimidating Vlad folds his arms and stands next to me and looks down at me. There are a series of CCTV cameras angled at all the passageways of the hotel and a range of security alarms which control the front gates and doors of the property.

Guillermo then sits in front of me. He is unshaven and with unkept hair, he speaks abruptly and to the point. He asks me what I have been told about what he does and I confess to knowing little - though when three young women in fine dresses and high heels appear in the reception area I get the picture. 'You mean you don't know?' he asks as he laughs. '¡Vamos es un puti club!,' (come on, it's a brothel!) he says and turns away from me to turn on the computer. More young women come and go and fiddle in their lockers. 'Es que había aprendido en el colegio hace años pero no me enseñaba bien de hablar' (they taught me English a long time ago but they



Fig. 1. Guillermo's CCTV system in his security office. Image: author, 2017.

didn't show me how to speak well) he says as he looks down and swivels on his broken chair.

As we talk about his business, we are interrupted by a dispute on the third floor which requires Guillermo's intervention. He leaves me and reappears on his own CCTV cameras interjecting with three women who look to be visibly upset. 'Siempre pasa con las chicas' (it always happens to the girls) says Vlad in a booming voice and shakes his head. Vlad, who has been in Spain now for over a decade, says this is the worst job he has had as he says he has worked in the roughest nightclubs of Madrid. I try to work out what exactly is going on but before I can ask him more Guillermo leaves from Camera 3 and within 20 seconds returns to where we are.

Guillermo silently turns to his computer and brings up his website which is a glossy wannabe high-class prostitution service. As another woman in a towel hands him over €140, he then shows me his website which brims with naked photos of the girls working for him. He is envious of the international sex chat forums which mention his service — only he doesn't know what they say as they are in English. We flick through a few comments which recommend other rival services and he clicks on their websites, cursing at them saying they are 'una mierda' (shit) because they look 'cutre' (cheap).

After another tall blond comes over and hands another couple of hundred euros in cash to him, he explains how he wants me to give him English classes (so he can understand the international sex forums) and help him navigate what people say about the service he offers. 'Pero tienes que conocer el sitio, vamos' (but you have to be familiar with the place, let's go) he says as he leads me past the reception where all the women assemble in the main hall.

As they flick their hair around and brush down their short dresses which cling tightly to their slim figures, we walk first to the far right, passing several rooms well kitted out with a sofa and bar; 'aqui se caliente la cosa' (here things warm up) says Guillermo. In one room, an old bald man sits sipping a Heineken, looking anxiously around as we pass. Guillermo then shows me the standard rooms which could be any hotel room in Spain: a double bed, bathroom and thick

curtains to deter the light from the night time activities. We go upstairs, the size of the room increases as does the price; the bathrooms are bigger and there is a huge mirror on the ceiling. Normally, 'una chica' (a girl) for 30 minutes costs ϵ 70 and for an hour ϵ 140 in the standard rooms but with the larger rooms, fitted with Jacuzzi there is an extra ϵ 55 for the room per hour. As we walk, I ask Guillermo how much it is for two women. 'Lo doblas tio' (double it mate) he says. Normally the first alcoholic drink is free and then the client pays what they require.

We then return to the main reception area to collect the 'suite key' where we see more women assemble to present themselves to a new client who will choose one of them. We then take the lift to the third floor and exit out where there are only two main doors. It is warm when we enter as Guillermo unlocks one door and turns on the light to reveal an apartment which could easily be the set for Sex and the City except that this really is sex in the city. These apartments are €300 per hour of course plus the sexual services of the 'chica'. [Field notes]

My primary function thereafter has been twofold a) to review porn forums which have comments written in English from clients who come to the brothel (two hours a week) and b) to teach the manager English (two hours a week). Given that Guillermo's main concern when I first started was to improve the efficiency of his business, he dedicated the first two hours of my time to review the porn forums and collect information about what clients said as well as create false online accounts and leave positive messages about the hotel and its services. This required me to not only be creative with email names and passwords but also the types of characters I had to be online. This went on for a few months until many of the accounts were closed as most forums caught on to the fact that each of my online identities seemed to be posting consistently positive messages about the hotel. After six months Guillermo told me to abandon this and concentrate on teaching him English.

Given that I am not a qualified English teacher, I have had to learn how to become a teacher and learn how to teach English, though much of it is still improvised. I first used standardised modes of learning through books but it became clear Guillermo didn't have enough time given his busy schedule of travelling between his three hotels and family commitments. I then tried to engage more online modes of learning using whatsapp and sending him links but he didn't find the time to respond. In the end, I started writing notes up in a book and told Guillermo to try and find time to study it for his next classes.

As time passed in the hotel, I came to learn that I was part of a string of other entertainments for Guillermo. Outside the time he spent with me, he was fine dining, sleeping around with random women behind his wife's back, going shooting with his informal security staff which included a national police and civil guard officer and driving around on and off-road one of his eight expensive cars and jeeps. Most of these things seemed to give Guillermo very minimal pleasure and he showed regular disinterest in the typical conversations about these things with his circle of friends and contacts. Aside from sharing dirty jokes and videos of naked women, Guillermo and I came to enjoy talking about history, something which others showed little interest in. Indeed, many of the English classes simply turned into discussions about history. Between all this, I have managed to get quite an intimate view into the workings of the hotel.

The 'Luxury Hotel'

The hotel in which I have been working is located around 7km from the centre of Madrid in a neighbourhood which is neither extremely wealthy nor exceptionally poor. Most of the surrounding area is a mix of residential blocks of flats, houses, small businesses and within five minutes in the car, one can be on the M40 which is one of the main motorways that circles Madrid. From the outside, one would perhaps not catch on that it was a hotel and was just a hotel given the official plaque on the outside. However, once you push the high doors, inside there is patio and small Greek statue fountain. Up the steps, the thick glass door must be opened from the security office behind the reception once the client has been approved by the staff. Inside, the lighting is dim by the small lamps which sandwich famous works of Spanish art. In the middle of the wide space is a large round table with fresh flowers on and numerous cards advertising the hotel and its services.

To the immediate left is the reception area and behind it the security office and a fire exit where cleaning staff, deliveries are taken and where Don Condón (Mr Condom as they call him) comes to sell to the women condoms as well as other related sex products for their business. As one looks from the immediate left to centre, there is a toilet next to the reception and a cash machine before the stairs which drift up to the three floors of different styled rooms. To the immediate right is Bar 1, and looking back towards centre there is a stock room and a narrow corridor which trails past Bar 2, 3, and 4 before it leads to another fire exit where around 20 women share four bedrooms. The women don't live there per se but stay there for extended periods of up to three weeks, depending on the agreement they have with Guillermo. At the back there is a car park for hotel staff and for the women where most smoke in the time between their clients, surrounded by more high fences.

How Prostitution Works in the Hotel

There are around 40 women who work in the hotel; some more long term than others, who come for short periods of time, often either to fund further studies, pay off debt or/ and to establish some housing/family stability. For this reason, the population continually shifts and this affects the dynamics and relationships between the women. Every day new women send naked photos to the hotel mobile, a form of 'job interview' as the images determine their potential selection. For those who want to stay in the hotel and work continuous nights there is often a waiting list and some even have to prove themselves to be good earners before they can be considered to obtain a bed in the hotel. This normally happens when one of the women has a week off and/or they go on holiday. Nevertheless, the women cannot be away for too long it seems and this is related to their debt, how much they spend when they are away and how much they put aside for financial commitments related to family. They may also lose their 'spot' as there is intense competition between them with regard to their appearance and earnings.

While the hotel promises to be a potentially good earner for the women as most earn around €5,000 a month in cash (a few even earn up to €15,000 a month), it is also a work that is emotionally, mentally and physically demanding. The conditions are detrimental to their health and safety; most develop alcohol and drug dependencies to endure the long and arduous shifts as well as adhere to the sexual requests/fantasies of

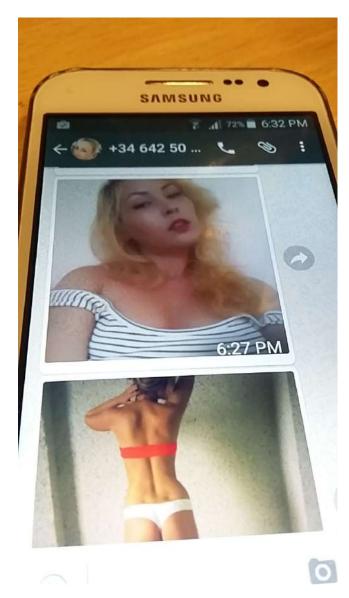


Fig. 2. Women send semi-naked images to Guillermo to see if they can get work. Image: author, 2017.

the clients. In addition, many clients demand that the women take certain drugs and as bonus they are paid more.

The client will enter the establishment, be shown into one of the bars on the right, will be offered a drink from the bar and then shortly after begins the 'presentation' which is a kind 'female parade' in which the women flaunt themselves to the client, answer his questions and reveal a price. The client has a notebook at hand to take notes as the women enter and leave one by one. Depending on the hour (such as Fridays and Saturdays, as well as days when European football is broadcast), as many as 20 women can present but during afternoons, very few are available. Once the client has made his choice, the chosen woman will re-enter and they will go upstairs together to a room. Shortly after, the respective woman will come down with the cash to pay for the room hire - as she charges what she likes on top of that for a variety of services which vary from standard sex to things like hard-core anal to foot licking or just hugging and talking.

Between this, the women may be randomly interrogated by Guillermo regarding the 'legal questions' - the women are trained in protecting the establishment from covert council inspections and/or police raids. It is illegal to sell sex from closed establishments but not if the women rent the rooms themselves - hence the emphasis on ensuring that the women work for themselves. However, this is jeopardised because most of the women who have drug and alcohol problems don't always remember what they should say if interrogated about the hotel's operations and some women don't speak Spanish well. This coupled with the high turnover of women means that the social dynamics are constantly shifting and thus rules and regulations are frequently flouted and ignored. The result is that there is no stable working culture/environment and the supervisors, who come as often as they go because they get fired for stealing from the safe, struggle with keeping a sense of order:

We are constantly interrupted during the class by two new Italian women who used to work selling sex in a private location in Ibiza. The two women look like sisters and have applied large amounts of make-up over their damaged and warty skin. Both have operated lips, face and breasts; they stand practically bare-chested in front of Guillermo who only looks down as he goes through the legal questions. The tall blond whose lipstick seems to fall off as she speaks barely speaks Spanish and has to communicate through her sister whose level is marginally better. They get some of the questions wrong about the fact that they charge money and about the shift lengths: Guillermo grits his teeth and reminds them.

They leave to continue presenting themselves as Guillermo then summons a girl called Gabi and tells her off as well for not coming down earlier to present when her shift started at 6 pm (it is now 7 pm). Guillermo then explains that he needs more women as the business is picking up and too many start work but stop after a few shifts. He convenes two more to the desk before asking them if they have any friends who want to work. Another new girl, who seems to be from South America, comes to the desk in what looks like some sort of sexy wonder woman outfit. She gets her cracked mobile out and starts showing us one of her friends who is '40 years old but looks 30' as she describes. 'There are other two', she says, but they are 'illegal' and 'don't have the papers yet'. Guillermo nods and invites them to send him some sexy pictures. [Field notes]

This makes the work extremely precarious because none of the women have a contract per se as they work self-employed – not that this form of work is official nor can be registered with the social security offices since prostitution in Spain is not a profession. There is constant economic pressure on the women to earn money which creates significant competition between the women and causes many other problems. While many use drugs and alcohol to not only cope with the nature and frequency of their labour, they are also in the main obligated by the clients to enable their sexual fantasies. While many seem to try and maintain a brave face, it is clear that underneath there is significant suffering which many seem to buffer by investing in their bodily appearance and a range of expensive consumer goods which may reflect otherwise that they are 'prostitutes'. All this is furthermore amplified by Guillermo's laborious network of CCTV cameras which only perpetuates a sense of insecurity, paranoia and, in a few cases, suicidal feelings.

Security

Guillermo's use of CCTV cameras is one of many measures he takes to prevent the ever-present risk of an armed robbery since other similar establishments are robbed on a daily basis (there have been cases within two square miles of the hotel). This is also why Guillermo stores several shotguns, various pistols and machine gun in his secure bunker on the third floor of the establishment. Guillermo also informally employs a National Police and Civil Guard officer to assist in curbing potential problems. These people also assist when legal barriers present themselves such as fines, inspections, etc. Two Russian men – one of which holds a day shift (Vlad) and a night shift (Andrei), also patrol the reception area to deal with problematic clients and potential robbers. This is because dangerous clients also come in and Guillermo wants to be assured he is ready for this:

...we are abruptly interrupted by a sudden invitation from Guillermo to see his weapons. I agree and leave the seat and walk with both him and Pedro past a few girls in the hallway and into



Fig. 3. Gun shopping with Guillermo after one year of fieldwork. Image: author, 2017.

the lift. We go to the third floor where it is hot and humid and walk along the corridor to Guillermo's bunker. He pulls out of his shorts a keyring which unlocks the four bolts on the other side of the thick metal door before unlocking it with another key. Inside, the small studio flat it is a bit messy with clothes and magazines, and on the bed is a small fortune and a laptop. Guillermo goes over to a small metal cabinet and unlocks it. Out he pulls a shotgun and proudly holds it 'lately I am hitting 100% of the plates when I go out shooting,' he says as he aims the gun at the wall. He then shows us the large cartridges which go with it, explaining how each bullet has nine small balls in (I suppose shrapnel) which split when fired. Down at the bottom of the bed is a riot helmet which Guillermo says is completely bullet proof as well as a thick vest which can take shots from the shotgun. I smile politely as he shows me all this and pull amazed faces, asking to hold the gun; it is not even that heavy as I take it in my arms and feign firing it at the wall. I ask him whether there is a real risk and he shows me a news article on his telephone of a robbery in which the offenders stole €40,000 in cash as well as jewellery and other things stashed in the safe. [Field notes?

Throughout the fieldwork, though varied in their socio-economic profile, Vlad told me that some of the clients were wanted by the police and a few even for murder. Guillermo was also concerned about what the women knew about him since, over the last few years, some of them had tipped off hitmen to raid and rob the establishment. Guillermo's preoccupation with security over the course of the fieldwork period slowly increased and after five months of the study he managed to obtain a licence to carry a gun with him. To this day, he attends a shooting range twice a week to improve his accuracy, and frequently boasts about his abilities at 'hitting people in the chest' as well as 'improving the aim with the left hand' because 'you never know if your right hand will get hurt or damaged so you need capacity with both'. While Guillermo seems to be a placid character, there have been very anxious moments where his passive state has been abruptly disturbed when he got angry. He seems to be a nervous person who tries to give of a sense of personal stability. Jokingly one evening, when we were out to dinner, he said to me 'I have no problem to kill someone in my hotel, this I can justify

but if we are out in public, it becomes a bit more complicated,' and laughed. I don't doubt he can do this after hearing his tales of fighting in Afghanistan and killing people as well as the times he has showed me, without emotion, videoclips of people being killed.

The Clients

The clients vary in age and nationality, ranging from young men in their late 20s to those in their 70s. Some are local and regular clients while others are tourists and some are retired and powerful politicians, businessmen and other professionals. Almost all seem to be in relationships/married and have the capital to spend between €100 and €1000 on sessions with prostitutes for services. Most of these people tend to have expendable money and often pay more to take drugs with the women or for them to take drugs while they engage in sexual activities with them. This can range from just talking, getting a hug and drinking to a range of sordid sexual acts which can involve objects, pissing and shitting and bondage-like rituals. Very often there is the expectation that if powerful politicians or 'gente de la casa' (powerful politicians or wealthy regular clients) then the requests for the women are taken more seriously and one or a number of the women can be summoned to serve should one of these men come through the door. The hotel is also a haven for professional criminals as I came to know after having been told about a group of four English men who came into celebrate their 'pay days'. Vlad told me 'here we don't ask questions if people are spending, it is their business, take these four English guys who come in the other day they spent €6,000 in 20 hours so of course they are welcome here'. I was later to briefly meet them:

When I walk up the steps, Leena, the supervisor says 'here are other English men' and she introduces me to them. They stand there drunk, frowning at me wondering if I am English or not before one says 'you're not English mate' in an East-end accent and when I tell them I'm from Camberwell, the blond one pulls a face while a bald one goes to the toilet. They are the regulars here and spend a lot of money; in the words of Vlad 'they are good clients'. 'The whores are cheaper here mate' shouts the blond English guy as they start to wonder off together into Bar 1.

I walk past them into the security office while Leena directs them to the bar. Soon after, she turns off the camera to 'let them eat and drink without being watched'. She rushes around trying to locate one girl (Colombian) who they demand to see first. It seems as if she has another client and in a panic, Leena screams down the tanoy 'presentacion en el bar 3'. I sit down with Vlad and he looks tired. He has been away since 3 am doing a night and day shift as the regular night shift worker has missed a plane and couldn't work his shift. The girl who the English men want to see suddenly appears doing her make-up and changing her shoes in the reception area. She rushes in to present herself: apparently, she is popular with them and Leena adds 'one of them will have her for a few hours and she always comes down exasperated'. Thereafter the English men — all with their sunglasses on — each retire up the stairs with a girl each on their arm. 'See you later Camberwell' says one jeeringly. [Field notes]

The forgotten stories of the hotel are clearly those of the women who are seen as fuck objects; a transaction made for a service to be obtained.

Socio-economic Bondage: The Decision to Prostitute

The decision these women took to prostitute is not clear-cut and is related to the almost impossible scenarios they have felt as a consequence of a shrinking labour market, which is by the day affected by national and local Spanish companies contracting out cheaper labour in foreign countries. This form of *socio-economic bondage* binds them to particular grey areas in the economy such as that which makes up Spain's growing sex industry. Coupled with family responsibilities, the decision to prostitute becomes one of having no choice but to choose and this was the case for 'Paula':



Fig. 4. Talking to Gema - the notes say: 'someone who truly loves me', in response to the question of what she really wants. Image: author, 2017.

As she sits down, I notice the wrinkles on her face come through the makeup. At first she doesn't look me in the eye but when I ask what her name is and she says Paula, I sound unconvinced and ask her 'what's your real name?' 'Gema' she says and beams a smile 'but we don't normally call each other by our real names'. She sits calmly, cross legged. Initially from Valladolid, she moved to Madrid to find work in 2005 but was laid off shortly after. As it transpires, she has spent one year in the hotel previously working in all sorts of jobs; the most recent, a plastic factory in Fuenlabrada [a poor postindustrial part of Madrid where unemployment is high] which was hit badly by the financial crisis of 2008. Thereafter, it made redundancies year after year and contracted Chinese personnel to work. Her situation was made more complicated with she divorced and her son developed some health complications. She says she copes with the work, she can choose the clients and no one is obligating her and it is good money. Its not all sex, some people come in her and their lives are in shambles, they want a hug or just to talk so it's a mix' she says. [Field notes]

While on one hand, the perks of the job include the choice to choose the client, the emotional and physical demands of her work are heavy; she has frequently complained to me about having major back pains from

working a whole weekend without sleep and rarely smiles on a day-to-day basis. Paula is concerned that her son will find out what she does which would be 'a nightmare come

true'. However, to cope with the work, Paula takes cocaine every night and drinks heavily. Like Paula, many women reflect on these kind of conditions which made them contemplate prostitution and this can be traced directly to the current precariousness of the labour market and rampant competition for temporary work. The hotel, therefore, becomes for many somewhere where money can be made quick. This was the case for Paloma who I met in September 2016:

I ask Maria, the supervisor, about the new women in the club and how so many now seem to be around early in the day but our conversation is interrupted by the arrival of two new young women from southern Madrid. Both aged 20, they are sisters although look totally unlike each other, 'only by mother' says Sheryl in a tight blue skirt as her curls dangle over it. The other, thinner and more pail, who has scars and cut marks down her wrists, has a kind of cross-eyed look and I'm not sure if she is looking at me as she talks and adjusts her purple gusset type top which are filled with her large breasts. Her name is Paloma. They have only been at work a few days it seems and feel the pressure and competition, and as they complain/worry about their potential to get clients, they lean over and sigh on the reception desk. [Field notes]

One week later, however:

The presentations continue and Vlad tells me how Paloma was sacked by Guillermo – though Vlad communicated the news as Guillermo didn't want to. Paloma, it seems, was wanted by the police for several offences including violence against a police officer. To me she looked as if she had had a hard life for when I saw her arms they were scarred and bitten. Somehow Guillermo had got hold of pictures of her legs and upper arms which had large circular-like scars on; it looked as if she had been tortured or something. Posing as the sister in law of Sheryl, she had tried to work in the hotel but Vlad said she had no interest from the clients: no man wanted to have sex with her. 'She will disappear, but we can't have risks like that in here' says Guillermo. [Field notes]

I was fortunate in this short time to talk to Paloma who came from a working class background, had drug problems and was in and out of school. She had a criminal history and spent some years on the run from the police. Her experience is typical to this part of the sex industry. If the women don't take clients, they earn no money: they have no choice. Moreover, although from the outset, these working conditions may seem reasonable given the pay, other precarious circumstances arise in several formats related to the danger to which they expose themselves in the rooms with the clients (as legally they are not protected from what happens as they have rented the room and what takes place in there is consensual between two parties).

From Socio-economic to Commercial Bondage: Self-objectification and Decisions to Stay in Prostitution

The significant competition for clients and social status between the women causes many arguments in the hotel. Naturally, this competition is evident in their disputes which many times Guillermo has to end up resolving as the female supervisors' struggle with intervening and the male security staff show no interest. Physical appearance, therefore, becomes intrinsic as a means of navigating these quarrels. As noted earlier, while many women earn large sums of money, much of it is spent on consumer goods

and is reinvested in their bodies (hair, nails, botox injections, operated breasts); many simply become caricatures of themselves and this physical transformation only feeds the meritocratic pressure which the space and context impose on them to earn more money, compete with other women, take extravagant holidays and buy expensive commodities as proof of their participation in consumer society:

I continue my conversation with Leena and we get talking about the women's earnings and spendings concluding, as she puts it, that many are in significant debt 'if you earn a lot of money, and you aren't clever how you use it, it goes'. She then says that many of the women spend a lot of money on their bodies and other clothes and commodities to retain their youthfulness and attraction, 'casi todas están operadas' (almost all are operated) she says. [Field notes]

The object nature of their existence seems to be reinforced by the continual expectancy to provide sexual services – given the lack of alternatives but with clear consumer rewards and ideological social status – and augmented by the mostly male-oriented management structure, which taken together, produces a sort of a self-objectification of their gender. What seems to happen then is that various emotional and psychological traumas of past experiences and daily labour are subjectively anaesthetised by the recompense of seemingly never-ending participation in a hyper-sexualised, microconsumer world which is driven by the demands made on the women as much as those which they make on themselves and this is what seems to encompass their self-objectification.

Establishing Mr English

It is into all this that has stepped Mr English, or if one would have it, the role I play:

Guillermo and I sip our beers and watch the women parade in and out as they make presentations and fiddle on their phones as they wait. Two new girls from Ecuador come in and Almudena takes their identificatgion as they wait nervously looking over at us. Very short looking' says Almudena as Gabi then comes down to show them around. A very young skinny girl then comes up to us with large breasts; her operated lips make her face look disproportionate and she holds her stomach as if she is feeling ill; one arm is almost entirely decorated with tattoos. She wanted to go to the pharmacy to get some medication but she was told to wait for a client who had asked specifically for her. She returns to the reception area as Don Condom comes to the door to sell sexual-related goods. As I leave, Guillermo jokes how I should dress up in a Santa outfit for the whole month of December as Santa Claus singing Merry Christmas. I joke and pretend to shake hands with a client as he leaves in the reception area ho ho ho espero que hayas echado un buen polvo' (ho ho ho, I hope you had good sex with us) and he and Jaime laugh as Guillermo says 'Mr English y su bromas' (Mr English and his jokes). The role is becoming me. [Field notes]

In these notes, taken some six months into the research, I reflect on how I have *become* the role of 'Mr English' as well as how it was *becoming* me. This had not always been the case since for some time I had dedicated myself to cultivating some form of identity which could allow me to act comfortably in the hotel. In particular, the security staff were extremely cautious about my introduction to the hotel and this made it difficult to

offer too much curiosity to how things worked as it would have generated increased suspiscion. This meant that any research agenda needed to be stealthy managed to learn and know how this respective cultural field operated. Aspects of my research identity have had to shift in accordance with the social and cultural variables of the hotel and, later on, in other contexts with Guillermo. For example, when I first met Guillermo, he called me by my first name, then after some time it changed to 'Profe de inglés'. However, over the months it has become 'Mr English' and since remained thus. This transition has produced a shift in my research identity which the following figure indicates:

Aspect	Identity shift		
	×	From 3 months	From 3-6 months
Personal	Formal, polite,	Informal, polite,	Brash, direct, jokey,
characteristcs and demeanour	curious, aloof	jokey, confident	arrogant
Working relations with Guillermo	Punctual, formal	Flexible, formal	Informal
General interaction with prostitutes	Low	Medium	Low
Access to associados	Minimal	Commonplace	Commonplace
Access to interesados	Occasional	Minimal	Commonplace
Access to inner circle	Never	Very occasional	Commonplace
Observations of weapons	Minimal	Common	Almost everyday
Confessions of corruption	Never	Occasional	Commonplace
Invitations to travel	Never	Occasional	Commonplace
Invitations to eat/dine/drink/go out	Rarely	Medium	Almost weekly
Invitation to family events	Never	Rarely	Often
Trust level	Low	Medium	High

'Daniel' was initially someone curious, ignorant of things and perhaps taken back by proceedings in the hotel, partly because he was alien to them both socially and culturally. Daniel was formal and polite, even reserved avoiding confrontation and made jokes to neutralise tense situations such as these:

Vlad stands in the corridor smoking a cigarette which he holds outside as if it makes no difference that the smoke is drifting inside. There is some tension in the air as I come in and it seems I have walked in in the middle of an argument between Vlad and one of the women. I sit

down and make a comment about the shitty state of the chairs to which Vlad replies how they are 'not for sitting on'. I then get up and pull a disgusted face and he starts to laugh. 'Me caigo bien con Daniel' (I get one well with Daniel) he says and punches me hard in the arm. [Field notes]

Winning the trust of Vlad and Andrei – the main security staff – was key to allowing myself to get to know Guillermo. In the early months of the study, they used to crowd the security office where I worked on the computer or where I talked with Guillermo, almost monitoring me. However, this was relaxed after some months and in time I came to know the 'asociados' (people who work and collaborate with Guillermo on a basic, professional and legal level), 'interesados' (people who also work for Guillermo but essentially take advantage of Guillermo's economic power and social status for their own benefit) and members of Guillermo's 'inner circle' (Guillermo's most powerful allies which include connections in political factions Pápa, Raul and Jaime – in short they are his friends with whom he spends most of his social time). Once 'Daniel' saw that it was beneficial to go along with and laugh at racist, misogynistic and sexist jokes/comments, agree to some respect on how women are seen in the hotels and show fascination and wonder for tales of violence and war (since Guillermo served in the military), then he became increasingly admired. In some ways, I had little choice for if I was to fail to respond to macho banter, I was branded 'gay' and this is not a label which carries weight in an ultra-masculine environment where the norm is the sexual conquest of women. So Daniel as a character could not have lasted long and had to concede somewhat to an ultra-masculine identity.

After three months, Guillermo started inviting me to lunch and dinners at which he would introduce me thus 'this is my profe de inglés' meaning 'English teacher'. These social events connected me to members – at all levels – of Guillermo's operations while at the same time gave him a sense of kudos; that he was learning a language which would help elevate him in the world of the rich and famous in which he interacts such as those described in the field notes at the beginning of the paper. On many occasions during these times, I was almost constantly dragged into sharing my opinion about the women in the hotel, women in general, and/or fucking and putting up with borderline practical jokes:

During our fine dinner of squid and various other Galician dishes, it transpires that Guillermo fired his night-time supervisor for charging clients for drinks even though he invites for the first drink for the rent of the room. As the women serve our food, Jaime and Guillermo dribble over them and joke about how they are 'in the market' (their term for looking for women to sleep with). We get on to the subject of the women in the hotel and Guillermo shows me Sweet naked on his phone and asks me who I like from the hotel. I confess to wanting to 'fuck Laura' because she is 'natural looking' and am then congratulated for my choice: the fact that I finally disclose something about how I supposedly feel about the women is met with relief and they continue the banter about the them. Jaime apparently loves 'big tits' as Guillermo says 'Merche has the best tits, but good choice Mr English'. [Field notes]

And:

Raul and Guillermo then appear from nowhere and start to cajole with me in the security office. I start to sweat slightly when they say 'we need to talk to you about a problem'. At this point I think my cover is blown and they have either found out I am a researcher or that I have been writing down what happens in the hotel. Neither of these is the case as they ask me to 'guarder unas pistolas y armas' (look after some guns and weapons) and Guillermo hands me his gun. As I hold it and start to nod as if I accept the challenge, there is a pause before the joke comes out and they snigger to themselves while Maria tries to avoid pulling a neutral face over her smile. [Field notes]

The transition into 'Mr English' has come at a cost for I have had to spend many nights out, often arriving home late some mornings and has gone from toleration of Guillermo's racist and sexist comments and blaze nature about women and fucking to reproducing them. Mr English is more brash and direct, he shares personal aspects of his life and history, and is not afraid to share tales of his sexual deviance, laughs hard and long at stories which relate to others in the inner circle which he has come to know. He helps himself to drinks when he wants and can go about the hotel at his leisure. He is privy to Guillermo's weapon store, the details of his affairs and sexual frivolity, admires the photos of the women he sleeps with and congratulates him on them. Mr English knows even his bizarre fetishes and sexual desires, as well as his feelings about his wife and family and knows his favourite food and where he likes to dine. He is asked his opinion on Guillermo's business direction and how to manage conflictive dynamics in the hotel. Mr English is at the centre of jokes and is granted licence to make them to others. He is embraced instead of hand shaken. He is back slapped instead of cautiously evaluated. He is invited rather than excluded.

Curiously, the shift from Profe de Inglés to Mr English produced a tension in the relationship I had with some of the women in that it meant I had to leave many relations behind and recommit to the audacious sexist and macho attitudes of those around Guillermo; after all, one cannot remain in an inner circle and be seen to start caring too much or showing too much concern for the women in the hotel. While there have been exceptions in that Mr English remains in close contact with several the women, this is often done outside the premises in order to not mix the two identities: one identity which flanks with Guillermo and another which is the complete opposite to everything he embodies and which is akin to Daniel.

The culmination of Mr English has also resulted in being given various assignments which I have somehow managed to avoid without losing the benefits of being Mr English which are only related to his access to information and little else. Mr English has been asked to 'test' out the other hotels as a mystery shopper (all paid for of course, including food, drink, woman and hotel). He has been asked to go to another local private sauna with Jaime, the National Police officer involved in his operations. He has also been asked to go to Germany to collect a new car which Guillermo had purchased for €150,000. Mr English is therefore much more than a Profe de Inglés and resembles nothing in relation to Daniel: he is emblematic of what is around him and to maintain his presence he obliges in the reproduction of the very cultural milieu in which he is working.

The Climax: Hardcore Ethnography

This began as temporary work recommended to me through a friend. I didn't expect to turn up in a luxury hotel working for Guillermo and or that after one year I may be in a position to be starting to offer new insights into how this kind of indoor prostitution functions. What I am saying is that I never expected this even to become a potential research study but having been placed in this situation and being given this potential access, it became difficult for me to ignore what was going on given my research profile and methods which I used to study social groups. Since then, I have carefully documented what I could about how I have become immersed in this world and what new insights it can offer us into how prostitution works as well as the incestuous links with powerful political and social structures.

To some degree this is suspicious, since if the dominant ideology of decision-making with regard to prostitution in Spain relates to that taken by empowered women, it means that all other socio-cultural and structural pressures are removed from consideration. This is reflected in Spanish policy and law and partly explains why prostitution as a profession or activity is perhaps considered something autonomous and punishment is potentially directed at clients or buyers. Nothing changes, the sex industry in Spain is almost intrinsic to cultural life: it is entirely functional which means there can be no clear policy on its eradication nor can there be great commitment to its safe management. For this reason, legal loopholes emerge and new spaces for its operations emerge and this is what seems to have happened in the case of Guillermo and his hotels. As the economy continues to contract, new women will continue to begin to work for Guillermo and the business ticks over producing this *socio-economic bondage*: women who have limited options in formal labour markets and are bound to surviving in grey sectors of the economy like the expanding sex industry.

And Guillermo? He would argue, as he has done many times to me, that he is simply exploiting a market opportunity. His place in time, space and history is one of a neoliberal entrepreneur; a business guru who 'is his own boss'. He could be seen as the ultimate female oppressor, someone uncaring to his workforce and totally benefitting from their misery. After all, he is responsible for the working conditions in the hotel; he enforces the stringent rules, puts pressure on the women to compete with each other and can be ruthless when it comes to ensuring they comply with the frequently-changing dynamics. Nevertheless, the women he invites to work from his establishment need money, need some economic stability and for this reason there is a seemingly neverending stream of them coming into the hotel for work – replacing the previous ones who could not cope with the competitiveness of the work, its arduous nature and/or the oppressive environment.

Since starting the study, I have seen women come and go and others adapt and change; seen them increase their competitive edge by investing in their bodies, spending time in the gym, money on expensive consumer goods and on operations to improve their appeal. I think this reflects a kind of *commercial bondage*: once immersed in the space and dynamics of the hotel, the chances of problematic drug and alcohol use increases and decisions to continue in prostitution revolve around the financial investment and repair of the body in order to remain competitive. Its clear the micro-spatial dynamics endorse

these antagonisms and much of this is reflected in discourses of looking good, how much certain designer clothes are and who does which type of sexual service better than the other.

Though I do not know exactly when and how it will end, I will at some point have to withdraw and this will mean completely severing my ties with Guillermo and his world. While the thought of this is welcoming, at the same time, it is disappointing since after all Guillermo is a human, he has a family, he has feelings and to some degree I have started to understand his world and why he may see it that way. I have become his friend in some way. Radical feminists will frown on me for stating this but my unanticipated intention in this study has always been to expose gender inequality related to this particular arena of social life. I have had to do this by participating in precisely the interactions which support and sustain it. For me, this has been stressful but I am fortunate to have an ability to do this kind of research and I hope you will agree that the benefits of having access to this hyper-masculine world outweigh the presence of Mr English.

This is because on a broader level there is a more disturbing story to be told which relates to the trajectory of the essence of human feeling. Consider the range of services the women offer and the clue to why this is happening seems blatantly obvious. Their 'need' here goes beyond a fuck or a blow job and although undoubtedly they relate to sexual gratification, this seems to be more about the absence of intimacy. These men lack intimacy, they lack time with their loved ones which is not to say they are victims of neglect. They also produce their own distance: long hours at work, distractions on mobile phones, and so on, for it is a distance which is structurally and commercially determined; they are subservient to a political economy which requires them to work longer hours for a job which they could lose at any point. They are purchasing an experience which is supposedly aimed at filling that emotional void, but it does not. There is nothing to fill that gap and this represents the commercialisation of our culture: experiences for sale, stories to be got. In the end, it means nothing. The transactional element of paying for sex ultimately eliminates its emotional significance.

Witness the lack which exists in Guillermo's life; he is constantly paying for things, spending large sums of money on the false promise that it will make him happy. The lack of time with his wife combined with the ultra-masculine management structure inevitably influences how he thinks about women. As I write these words, he maintains ongoing affairs with two women, has his own private telephone to accommodate their communications and regularly visits other brothels and saunas and pays for sex. All to be able to tell stories but deep inside he is very unhappy: lost in a perpetual cycle of spending and consumption which supposedly gives him a higher social status. Yet all it feeds is a constant need to earn more money and the pressure in managing the complications related to his 'business'.

Then there are the experiences of the women; in this context, emotionally hollowed out by a form and frequency of this work which drains them of their most precious intimate feelings: Tatiana refuses to have boyfriends who want to have sex with her but who only 'buy her things'. The trauma of the work for many rationalised as recompense for simply reflecting the need they have to feel economically included and an ability to have an occasional consumer splurge, a handbag or a pair of new shoes. Everything is for sale, everything has its price, but no-one has any conception of value, of virtue, of what it takes to live a life in which we can be truly satisfied and content of who we are and what we have become. And at the fundamental level, it is this commercial assault on our most precious human feeling - intimacy - has only catastrophic results. We lose interest, we drift, we neglect, we ignore and traces of genuine feelings fade away like a forgotten memory. The commodification of intimacy erodes us as all we end up doing is looking elsewhere for something which we won't find or can't replace.

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Essay

Stagger Lee

How Violent Nostalgia Created an American Folk Song Standard

Duncan Williams *University of York*

Tradition ist die Weitergabe des Feuers und nicht die Anbetung der Asche. ~ Attr. Gustav Mahler (1860-1911, German composer)

Tradition is tending the flame, not worshipping the ashes (Translation by author)

Tending the Flame

There is a long tradition of storytelling in folksong. Before methods for transcribing and later for recording definitive versions existed, the oral tradition was used to pass on tales and deeds. And, as anyone familiar with 'Chinese whispers' will know, this process is not always accurate. Even when transcription methods had become available, the accuracy of the record can be questioned, as is the case in Sabine Bearing-Gould (1834-1924), an 18th century Anglican reverend, perhaps most famous for his earnest documentation of werewolves (Baring-Gould 1973), as well as many collections of English folk song, which were often unsurprisingly edited from the pious perspective of a religious man of the time, likely due to the collectors profession. Often, such songs are cautionary or moral tales, and thus the process of collecting and editing can change an oral history dramatically.

This essay will consider how one such instance, the song *Stagger Lee*, reflects changing attitudes of the audience and the narrator towards violence and masculinity in its portrayal of an initially real-world, and later supernatural, violent protagonist. How, and why this paean to violence, with its fetishistic vision of extreme masculinity, has become something of a standard in the American folk canon. It considers both the retelling of Stagger Lee's tale in song, and subsequent appropriation by cinema in depictions of race, sex, and violence as admirable or heroic qualities. In particular, a kind of sexual violence which is perhaps at odds with stereotypical views on homosexuality amongst the African-American community, which spawned, and in some cases continues to celebrate, Stagger Lee as a mythoform, archetype, and antihero (Nelson 2005).

Who was Lee Shelton?

'Stagger' Lee Shelton (1865-1912) was an African-American carriage driver and sometime-pimp from Missouri (Eberhart 1996). He became immortalized as a folklore antihero after murdering a drinking partner, Billy Lyons, following a political argument gone bad in a St Louis saloon on Christmas day, 1895. Sentenced to 25 years in prison, Shelton died in Missouri State Penitentiary after violating his parole with a subsequent conviction for assault and robbery.

'Stagolee came to personify the collective feeling of blacks at the bottom of society, and it was in this sense that Stagolee became a symbol of the black community' (Brown 2009).

Stagger Lee in Song

The song, Stack-a-Lee was first documented in 1897, becoming well known in African American communities along the lower Mississippi River over the following decade as Stagolee, Stagger Lee, Stack OLee and other variants (Price 1958). Two versions were published in the Journal of American Folklore in 1911, with notable recordings entering the charts through the 1920s and beyond (Miller 2006). The range of alternative lyrics, whilst genuine records of the original perpetrator and his punishments exist, offers a unique opportunity to examine how violence and masculinity are exaggerated and revered: Lee's black Stetson hat is universal, but subsequent revisions describe the appearance of a caul across his face, implying a history of violence, and later superstition as he is said to have made a deal with the devil in order to take on the form of animals. Some readings of dehumanization in literature at the time suggest that this can indicate a reflection of slavery, especially pertinent in the southern states after emancipation in 1863 (Copeland 2013). However, descriptions of violence as animalistic were common in folklore of the time across Europe, for example, in the aforementioned Baring-Gould's interest in werewolves, wherein dehumanization becomes antonymous to behavior which the Baring-Gould would regard as morally accountable, in other words, his point of view was likely to consider violent deeds as non-Christian and analogously animalistic. In any case, the number and violence of Stagger Lee's crimes becomes exaggerated, almost exponentially over each new rendition, to the point of a tale of multiple murders and male rape in the 1995 version by Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds. Stagger Lee embodies the archetype of a violent and dangerous antihero as his story is retold, and perhaps a symbol of racial conflict in the United States.

```
Now Stackerlee, he told Billy Lyon,

'Billy, I'm sure gon' take your life.

You have win my money, jack, and I found a foul dice.'

Now Billy Lyon, he told Stackerlee,

He said, 'Stack, please don't take my life.

I have two little child'en and my poor little weakly wife.'

'Now, one of them is a boy, Stack,

And the other one is a girl.'

But if you love your child'en, Billy Lyon, you will have to meet them in the other world.'

[...]

Now Stackerlee, he shot Billy Lyon

'Way down on that ballroom floor

It was early one mornin', just about fifteen to four
```

As sung by Foy Grant and filed in the library of congress by song collector Alan Lomax in 1934.

A central point of the narrative, particularly in the Lomax transcription, is Billy, the main victim, begging for his life. Billy's begging forms the main hook of Bob Dylan's version, which portrays Stagger Lee as an outright 'bad' man.

"You'll have to be gone before my man Billy Billy comes in,
Mr. Stagger Lee."

I'll stay here till Billy comes...
And furthermore I'll fuck Billy in his motherfucking ass.

[...]

Because I'm a bad motherfucker, don't you know?

And I'll crawl over fifty good pussies just to get one fat boy's asshole,
"Yeah, I'm Stagger Lee, and you better get down on your knees
And suck my dick because if you don't, you're gonna be dead, "
Said Stagger Lee

Billy dropped down and slobbered on his head
And Stag filled him full of lead
[scream]

As arr. and performed by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds (Murder Ballads, 1994)⁵⁰

Cave's Stagger Lee is presented in the form of a 'Toast', a pre-rap spoken word with its roots in Reggae and prison blues. Here, Lee states that he will sodomize Billy Billy when he arrives at the Bucket o' Blood inn, which also houses a bordello. This is loosely related to the true story in that Lee would have associated with prostitutes and did kill Billy Lyons in a gunfight in such a place (though allegedly in an argument over cards and a hat). However, here the similarities end. The wording is unambiguous, the threat becomes a brag, which becomes an action when Cave's antihero demands (and receives) oral sex at gunpoint from Billy Billy before killing him. Earlier versions depict Lee as an archetype of masculinity in line with commonly held stereotypes of African American culture, despite being an 'above-the-law' criminal. The same culture which revered and respected Lee has well-documented struggles with homosexuality (Lewis 2003; Black and Stevenson 1984; Constantine-Simms 2001). The unashamed nature of Cave's narrative implies a consciously contradictory revision to this archetype.

Context Amongst Murder Ballads

It would be unfair to characterize *Stagger Lee* as the only folk song which celebrates violence, or to imply that such songs only belong to the African American oral tradition – the truth could not be further from either statement. In fact, there is a rich history in the oral tradition of folk song which might initially seem grizzly or alien to first time listeners, in the murder ballad (Marshburn 1972). Perhaps it is no surprise that Nick Cave entitled the album containing his version of *Stagger Lee*, Murder Ballads (Cave et al. 2011). Such ballads were printed and sold on broadsheets as early as the mid 17th century in Europe, forming a notable portion of the repertoire available. Murder ballads often document true crimes, including in notable instances extreme crimes such as incesticide and fratricide, for example *Edward*, also known as *Henry*, *What Put The Blood?*, *My Son David*, and *The Two Brothers*, amongst other incarnations, is a murder ballad (Roud index 200). The details of the protagonist and his deeds are somewhat dependent on the geographic location, the moral compass of the collector, the number of generations of performer, and as is often the case in the oral tradition, the memory of

⁵⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nbe5RERDh4k (accessed 1 January 2018)

the singers themselves at the point of collection. As well as English, documented versions exist in, for example, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, and Irish. The basic narrative is that the protagonist reluctantly confesses to his mother that he is responsible for the murder of his brother, her son. He is then exiled, by choice. Lizzie Wan, or Fair Lizzie (Child Ballad 51) changes the narrative slightly, such that Lizzie is pregnant with her brother's child, and the brother then murders her. As in Henry, over the course of the song the protagonist eventually confesses and exiles himself. Murder ballads are typically told from the point of view of a moral compass where the deeds are not glorified or vilified. In this context, Stagger Lee is more unusual. The difference is that the protagonist is portrayed both as a hero and subsequently as an archetype for his deeds. Perhaps, to establish the extreme nature of the character, we might ask ourselves: how many other leading protagonists are portrayed in song as heroic when having forced other men to commit a sex act? And how does this behavior not contradict typical or traditional views of masculinity (particularly in African American culture)? Ethnographic accounts of stereotypical (i.e., heterosexual) masculinity generally condemns such acts, particularly among males (Ernst et al. 1991). It seems clear that Stagger Lee conducts these acts in order to display power and dominance rather than for personal sexual gratification. We might consider at what point committing male rape constitutes a masculine act - perhaps in the balance between active and passive participant, as in many other cultures and subcultures, for example, ancient Greece - or that the act itself is perhaps less important than the subsequent formation of the archetype. The character must evolve to remain constantly interesting to new audiences, and retaining the power to shock is perhaps a part of Stagger Lee's mythos and popularity. If that is indeed the case, it is unsurprising that the metamorphosis of Stagger Lee has not been lost on the world of cinema.

Appropriation in Film

Stagger Lee seems to have an enduring popularity, partly due to the changing nature of his story, which ensures his tale remains up-to-date (it was most recently adapted to a musical in 2015). In the movie by the Memphis born Craig Brewer's Black Snake Moan, a 2006 film with sex and race at its core, Samuel L. Jackson stars as a Mississippi bluesman, Lazarus Redd, a religious man who imprisons the female lead, played by Christina Ricci, as part of his spiritual duty to help her overcome promiscuity. Critics considered scenes such as the naked Ricci chained to a radiator in Redd's kitchen as deliberately provocative, and again Stagger Lee appears as an allegory for shocking but normalized dominance. Redd performs Stagger Lee to the delight of a juke joint audience. The juxtaposition of a traditional, upbeat blues groove with Jackson's delivery, which lyrically owes a great deal to Nick Cave's 1995 treatment, is quite striking. Despite his character's religious back-story, both the audience and the narrator appear to revel in the misdeeds of Stagger Lee as Jackson's character describes them.

Few commercially successful film directors of the past two decades can match Quentin Tarantino's enduring ability to shock and court controversy, often with explorations of racial tension and sexualized violence, prompting some critics to describe his work as 'ultraviolent' (Bouzereau 2000). Indeed, even now, Tarantino's storytelling remains controversial amongst commentators with religious perspectives (Sheppard 2016).



Fig. 1. Samuel L. Jackson as Lazarus Redd, performing the blues in Black Snake Moan.

Movieline critic Elvis Mitchell describes the director as 'one of the few working filmmakers eager to explore questions of race and identity in his work' in the forward to the script for Tarantino's 2015 film, The Hateful Eight set in Wyoming sometime after emancipation and therefore squarely in the same period of American history as Stagger Lee. The Hateful Eight features an ensemble cast, including a frequent collaborator of Tarantino's, and no stranger to Stagger Lee after his performance in Black Snake Moan, Samuel L Jackson. Jackson's character, Major Marquis Warren, is central to the plot of The Hateful Eight, which sees a mystery unfold in non-linear time in which Major Warren, a former Union soldier in the United States civil war, is isolated in a cabin with, amongst other villains, former Confederate soldiers. It might be a coincidence that Major Warren wears a black Stetson hat, not unlike the hat which features prominently in most versions of Stackolee/Stagger Lee. Like the historical versions of Stackolee and the much more recent Nick Cave version, The Hateful Eight is set on a cold winter's night (the real crime being committed on Christmas night). As in many versions of Stackolee, the first gunfight occurs (between Major Warren and General Smithers) over a card table, and Tarantino includes an early argument about hats in the script. Jackson's Major Warren himself is no angel and indeed, by design, there are no clear heroes, only antiheros (Collin 2016). The racial implications were not lost on Tarantino (Barksdale 2015). In the third 'Chapter', Major Warren, the sole black character in the film, states, 'You've got no idea what it's like being a black man facing down America', having deceived Russell's character, his only ally, Jon Ruth. Warren then briefly seems to make peace with the former Confederate, General Smithers, before his character adopts a Stagger Lee inspired narrative which culminates in his forcing the General's son to perform oral sex at gunpoint. Warren's character describes these actions gleefully,

With your boy at the business end of my gunbarrel I made him strip right down to his bare ass [...] I walked his nakkid ass for two hours before the cold collapsed him

Then he commenced to beggin' again, but this time he wasn't begging to go home [...] All he wanted was a blanket.

Now don't judge a boy too harshly, General. You ain't never been so cold as your boy was that day. You'd be surprised what a man that cold would do for a blanket.

You want to know what your boy did?

I pulled my big black pecker out of my pants

And I made him crawl through the snow on all fours over to it

Then I grabbed me a handful of that black hair at the back of his head

And I stuck my big black johnson right down his goddam throat

And it was full o' blood, so it was warm,

Oh you bet your sweet ass it was warm

And Chester Charles Smithers sucked on that warm black genghis for long as he could [laughter from Warren]

You're starting to see pictures, aren't ya?

Your boy, black dude, genghis in his mouth

Him shaking, crying, me laughing

and him not understanding [...]

I never did give that boy a blanket.

Transcribed by the author from *The Hateful Eight* (Tarantino, 2015, The Weinstein Co.).



Fig. 2. Samuel L. Jackson as Major Warren in The Hateful Eight.

Another shooting ensues, with, as in *Stagger Lee*, the provocateur Major Warren surviving. The victim begging for his life in this scene is further reminiscent of Lomax and Dylan's interpretations of *Stackolee*. Jackson's comical delivery of Tarantino's script clearly suggests that the forced oral sex is not an act that Major Warren is ashamed of, on the contrary, his character appears extremely proud of himself. This becomes a kind of sublimation, as the distasteful is transformed into something enjoyable (Pfaller 2009). In this re-re-imagining of *Stagger Lee*, we see the villainous and extreme normalized through Tarantino and Jackson's presentation of Warren as an antihero. In the fourth 'Chapter', Major Warren pays an ironic price for his actions, when he is shot in the genitals by a hidden gunman, his proverbial masculinity revoked. Major Warren nevertheless goes on to survive despite his injuries, experience a redemption of sorts as he forges an unlikely working friendship with the remaining former confederate soldier which endures to the finale of the film.



Fig. 3. Kurt Russell portraying Stuntman Mike in Tarantino's *Death Proof.* Note caul on the face, as the character of Stagger Lee is often described. A version of the song is playing in the background of this scene.

Death Proof shares a leading actor with The Hateful Eight in Kurt Russell, whose villainous character Stuntman Mike engages in a series of sexualized and sadistic murders (Anderson 2007). Stuntman Mike shares similarities with the fictionalized Stagger Lee: the protagonist of the tale (driving a 'death proof' muscle car), Mike has a caul across his face, and engages in a sexualised pursuit of his first victims, demanding a lap dance in the Texas Chili Parlor, a real-life dive bar in Austin, Texas. As in Stagger Lee, his victims have been drinking, and a version of Stagger Lee can be heard playing on the jukebox in the bar as Stuntman Mike engages in a dialogue with his victims in the first half of the film. Tarantino himself cameos as the barman in this sequence, and it seems unlikely that his choice of music is a coincidence. Tarantino is well-documented as a calculated soundtracker (Garner 2001), so it might be reasonable then to assume that these physical and personality traits are nods from the director to Stagger Lee as an archetype of sexualized violence, regardless of ethnicity.

A Heritage of Violence: Concluding Remarks

We might consider that nowadays there is a continuum between definitive article and living practice, and by being adaptable to such changes, songs like *Stagger Lee* can continue to enjoy new renditions and find new audiences. Changing attitudes to shock, sexualized violence, and masculinity in the past century can be seen in the adjustments made to *Stagger Lee*. Initially, a real-life murder ballad with a moral compass firmly suggesting that the protagonist was evil, and subsequently, towards a more fantastical anti-hero, especially in appropriations in recent film portrayals. The oral tradition, once a primary reference for historical storytelling, has been somewhat superseded by the technology of recording and distributing music: yet, the process of a recorded definitive

article does not seem to have stopped *Stagger Lee*'s evolution. We might infer a cultural mirror in the changes that occur in the narrative of his song, in our own views on violent storytelling and in the requirement to continually increase the shock factor in both songs and films. Does this tell us anything about the popularity of hyper masculine protagonists? Or is it simply in the capacity of a successful storyteller, like Tarantino, to manipulate masculinity in order to maximize impact? We know that his 'ultraviolent' movies are popular, and indeed that *Stagger Lee* has enjoyed an enduring popularity, for the purposes of this essay it is enough to state this popularity, rather than to consider *why* this heritage of violence should be popular. The *why* is beyond the scope of this essay, though perhaps as with most enduring songs, these are questions which are best left in the ear of the beholder in any case.

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Commentary

Headhunting as Reflexive Violence

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Abstract This is a commentary article on existing anthropological views on headhunting practices. Its focus is an article by Mikkelsen (2017) in this journal, 'Facehunting: Empathy, Masculinity and Violence among the Bugkalot.' The commentary article sees value in Mikkelsen's critical stance on the issue of extreme violence, such as headhunting not entailing a prior dehumanization of the victim. 'Headhunting as Reflexive Violence' addresses an issue of 'selective empathy,' and concludes that in light of the Bugkalot ethnography and impulsive headhunting, the discussion point could be one, following Persson and Savulescu (2017), of 'reflexive empathy.' The article argues that attention should be given to the material, plastic, and tonal practices celebrating and possibly even eliciting the kill. These might provide us with a rare window into the way cultural techniques can embellish violence.

Keywords Bugkalot, Ilongot, headhunting, sacrifice, empathy, masculinity, violence aestheticization, Mikkelsen

The [Bugkalot] men were fully armed with spears, bows and arrows, shields, and head-knives; geestrings apart, they were naked. Some of them wore on the head the scarlet beak of the hornbill; these had taken heads.

(Willcox 1912, 6)

Headhunting in Words and Action

As with other topics of recent interest, such as animism, the issue of headhunting may open up for a broader ontological evaluation. A review of the theme would include the following key contributors: Aswani 2000, Barton 1919, Bloch 1992, Chacon and Dye 2007, De Raedt 1996, Downs 1955, Furness 1902, George 1996 a & b, Hocart 1922, Hollan 2011, Hoskins 1996, Kruyt 1906, Lumholtz 1991, McGovern 1922, McKinley 1976, McKinnon 1991, Needham 1976, Roque 2010, M.Rosaldo 1980, R. Rosaldo 1980, Rousseau 1990, Siverts 1978, Tsing 1996, Valeri 1994, van der Kroef 1952, Waite 2000, Yang 2011.

Ethnographies from the Southeast Asian region inform us about ritualized violence for modulating generative balances between the sexes and between neighboring peoples. At the time when headhunting was still practiced in the Luzon Cordilleras, Barton writes: 'The war was carried on as a series of head-takings' (Barton 1919, 177). *Facehunting*'s focus on the biographic aspect of headhunting provides a contrast to those writings that highlight such larger formats of colonial geopolitics and regional power play (e.g. Black 1976, 31, R. Rosaldo 1980, Tsing 1996, 189). Mikkelsen's contribution (Mikkelsen 2017) based on fieldwork among the Bugkalot in the Cordilleras of Luzon, aligns with a

critical stance formulated by Rousseau: 'headhunting is more than an epiphenomenon of warfare' (Rousseau 1990, 275).

The Rosaldos address the topic of headhunting among the Bugkalot (Ilongot) with material from fieldworks beginning in the late 1960s. They shed light on the emotive contexts of the kill. However, the addition of Mikkelsen's view – also one which lays out the emotive enactment of eruptive violence – is not redundant. There can hardly be any final answer to what headhunting *is about* – no closure.

'Headhunter' as a descriptor affixes itself also to travelogue authorship, with the typical words 'among so-and-so headhunters' in the title line. Let me quote here one example from an ethnography in the northernmost part of the Austronesian world, the aborigines of Formosa (Taiwan). A book on the topic of headhunting was published in 1922 by Janet B. Montgomery McGovern. Its Preface bears the signature of an Oxford anthropologist and proponent of a pre-animist stage in the formation of religion, Robert Ranulph Marrett. The book's title: Among the Headhunters of Formosa. The frontispiece has a photo of a Yami couple, from Lan Yu (Botel Tobago / Orchid Island). The man wears a helmet, and he has a firm grip on a machete. The photo may have been included as an apropos to the title line: hinting at the possibility of severing heads. But since this is an illustration identifying a woman and man in what is tagged as the 'Yami tribe,' it is hardly conceivable that any heads have been chopped off. I observed a scenario such as portrayed by the helmeted man in 1979 (Røkkum 1991). The conically shaped, layered metal helmet with square apertures for eyesight is for protection against bad anitu spirits, not against bad humans. The machete is for charging at these spirits. On the face of it, bellicose, but only if cutting the image off from the anthropological grid foisted upon it. The opening line in the Preface of McGovern written by Marrett foregrounds the anthropological authorship itself: 'they [the headhunters] welcomed her with a respect that bordered on veneration' (McGovern 1922, 9). Marrett says that the book is for the 'general public' (McGovern 1922, 13). A fuller digest, he assures, has to come in future work.

Popular allure about the outlandish may adumbrate ethnography. Even where the notes on headhunting are sparse, the title line makes it a pars pro toto (cf. e.g. Haddon 1901). Headhunting, to no lesser extent than cannibalism and sacrifice, is up to this day a badge of savagery in popular imagination. For an update, see Millman (1998). His book is promoted as having been written 'by a guy who likes to get around.' The title gives a feel of the quaintness of exploration: An Evening Among Headhunters & Other Reports from Roads Less Traveled.

In the early years of American administration of the Philippines, around 1909, savagery was elicited and embedded in the very reasons for governing. Lieutenant-Colonel-cum-Professor Cornèlis de Witt Willcox had a reason good enough for suggesting that that headhunters of the Luzon Cordilleras deserved protection: from the rage vented against them by Christians lowlanders. In 1912, he published a survey of Cordillera groups: *The Head Hunters of Northern Luzon: From Ifugao to Kalinga – A Ride through the Mountains of Northern Luzon.* The final line of the title reads as follows: *With an Appendix on the Independence of the Philippines.* That was precisely what he did *not* want, so he had gone out into the Cordillera of Luzon on horseback to establish rapport (or perhaps an author's empathetic understanding, cf. above, McGovern 1922 and in a methodological outlook, Wikan 2013). Willcox noted that headhunting among these Cordillera groups targeted

people also on the outside, such as Christian lowlanders and Negritos. Renato Rosaldo (1980) describes feuding within the Cordillera region, he makes no mention of an incursion into the area by Willcox.

No allure, not even through such familiar terms as 'sacred violence' is to be detected in Mikkelsen's *Facehunting*. The essay defrocks the cultural sublimity of violence and its study by deploying the term 'murder.' He compares headhunting among the Bugkalot to head trophy-taking in World War II theaters. Hoskins pursues a similar, open-ended view, of heads taken as trophies in warfare and as specimen in science (see Hoskins 1996, and for a view on colonialism, Roque 2010).

Mikkelsen's focus on 'prereflexive' empathy differs from the cultural relativism that imbues the work of Michelle Rosaldo (1980), who filters Bugkalot emotion through the Bugkalot *gloss* on human interiority she harvested in fieldwork. In her reportage, 'Ilongots [Bugkalots] explain themselves — how they feel and why they used to kill' (Rosaldo 1980, 36). *Facehunting* suggests that the Rosaldos may have neglected the complexities of headhunting by seeing it as a 'traditional practice' (Mikkelsen 2017, 11). A key term for Mikkelsen, with his focus on unfiltered, personal, experience is that of *transgression*: through murder and the personal costs for the perpetrator. Mikkelsen seeks out the point of view of the headhunter himself and the transgressive reactions shown in reminiscences of the past. Violence — *contra* M. Rosaldo — is not the outcome of prior dehumanization.

The case of dehumanization is neither *a priori* in the case of punitive killings according to Fiske and Rai. For a perpetrator to 'feel pain, shame, humiliation, disgrace, or the fear and horror of dying' she/he needs rather be 'humanized' (Fiske and Rai 2015, 158, emphasis in the original). In other words, the punisher wants the perpetrator to experience empathy, before being put to death.

Enculturating Violence

If broadening the view to take into account ethnographic and historical records, headhunting was practiced as part of warfare in the Philippines. Yang (2011) adduces the more recent example of skirmishes in the Luzon Cordilleras with rebels of the NPA (New People's Army). The issue of humanizing or dehumanizing the victim was simply not relevant when the ethnographic case was war rather than headhunter's expedition. Bugkalot environs were populated with declared adversaries: hostile clans and hostile Christian lowlanders. Within the perspective of this broader format, a boy's initiation to the feat of decapitation might even be seen as a demonstration of prowess and coordination for a role as a warrior and as a hunter. The first kill (it seems that no more than one kill was expected) might simply be a test of manhood similar to the first kill, of game, among hunters. Collier and Rosaldo (1981, 302) comment on M. Rosaldo's ethnography; they emphasize the metaphoric match between taking heads and hunting. Headhunting could have been an abiding aspect of the lifecycle of the male Bugkalot, of growing up. Yang quotes informant recollections about playing headhunting games in childhood (Yang 2011, 162). In Yang's paraphrase of headhunters' reminiscences, one line reads like this: 'women always giggle and comment that the heads must have been very smelly (enamoy)' (Yang 2011, 183, endnote 14). R. Rosaldo writes:

Volatile, envious, passionate (at least according to their own cultural stereotype of the unmarried man [bunintaw]), they constantly lust to take a head (Rosaldo 2004, 175).

In Mikkelsen's portrayal, there is only a slight element of cultural stereotype: in the *post-mortem* defamation of the head. Mikkelsen draws a picture of a visceral terror causing vomiting and even fainting in the chaotic situation of the kill (Mikkelsen 2017, 11). Heads were left in the bush without further ado, and the recognition of the feat did not initiate the cutter into any distinctive status set. However, Mikkelsen and M. Rosaldo mention something like an ennui among young men. In M. Rosaldo's portrayal, it is exacerbated by innuendo coming from initiated elders (Willcox 1912, 72 records a similar trait.) In Mikkelsen's portrayal, enervation is exacerbated by innuendo coming from in-laws in matrilocal settings. What seemingly traumatizes a man is *not yet* having achieved the kill.

Then what happened *after* the kill? Facehunting makes no mention of an ear pendant formed by the scarlet beak of a hornbill (Willcox 1912, 62; Yang 2011, 163); this artifact could possibly convey an epitome of maleness. Yang reports that the US based New Tribes Mission present in her area of fieldwork since the late 1950s expected the Bugkalot churchgoers to stop wearing the ear pendant. The missionaries realistically perceived it as the referent of a kill. Chopping off a head may be an ephemeral act for the Bugkalot; it is dumped in the bush. The material and permanent concomitant of the deed, it seems, is one of a crimson pendant dangling from the upper cartilage of the boy's ear. Further ethnographic detail might even suggest that its red color encapsulates an image of the victim's blood.

Tossing the head in the bush can be seen as 'transgressive,' although in a slightly different sense than in *Facehunting*: as a preamble to the sexual freedom of male adulthood. Sexuality can be no less 'prereflexive' than the kind of empathy that, in Mikkelsen's account based on informant recollections, has visible, visceral effects. De Raedt on the Kalinga writes about the 'extraordinary attractiveness' (De Raedt 1996, 175) of the headhunter and women offer him 'love gifts' (De Raedt 1996, 176). A 'love gift' presented by a married woman would be tantamount to adultery. The return from the killing is not only a moment of pitched emotion; it also suspends normal prudence between the sexes. *Ritualized* transgression seems to have taken place during the celebratory feast afterward, the *buayat* (Yang 2011, 161). Willcox gives a close-up view of a Bugkalot dance rehearsed in honor of his Cordillera mission (Willcox 1912, 66–68). In one sequence, the male dancers charge at each other with 'head-knives,' the instruments used for chopping heads. The act of the kill is sublimated as the defining act of manhood.

Even in a broader, comparative view on headhunting, we can discern how transgression, even when it involves sexuality, is scripted in some way. Among the Toradja of Sulawesi, as described by George (1996a, 76), the adulation of a woman for her husband's headhunting success is delivered in solo song recital. Metcalf writes about rules that are broken among the Berawan of Borneo in the aftermath of the kill: sexual license is welcomed (Metcalf 1982, 132). So lewd was the women's dance that informants could only divulge its occurrence by innuendo and rolling eyes. Roth reviews accounts of headhunting in Borneo, mainly among the Dayak and the Dusun. One line reads as

follows: 'It was absolutely necessary to be the possessor of one head before marriage' (Roth 1896 [vol. 2], 164, emphases in the original). The Bugkalot case stipulates the same requirement, one head, and as in Borneo: no requirement of demonstrated valor in the act itself of the kill (the head of a defenseless victim is as good as the head of an ambushed, armed enemy). Also in the Luzon Cordilleras, the Kalinga adhered to the same tendency toward undiscerning head-taking (De Raedt 1996, 172).

Among peoples in the Cordilleras, it may be the ritualized tossing of the head that releases the sign of hyper-masculinity. Mikkelsen's argument that there is no dehumanization of the victim is plausible in light of this. Ritualization, either by tossing the severed head or by ornamenting it as in Borneo, makes it a dialogical subject for the killer and maybe even for a whole settlement. But this dialogue, even when accompanied by food and drink provisions, may not sustain empathy in the long run.

In the Solomon Islands, dehumanization of trophy skulls from raided populations on other islands – demonstrated their 'ultimate alienation' (Aswani 2000, 62). With pronounced parallelism, headhunters incurred identities of fish and pigs. Valeri, for the East Indonesian Huaulu, expands such equivalence to the hunt for game: 'the human victim is strongly assimilated to a hunted wild animal' (Valeri 2000, 113). Skulls on display were insignia of valor; Hocart (1922) offers a record of the materiality of this, of dedicated 'skull-houses.' Waite (2000) has made a close-up study of such pageantry of the headhunt. In the present day of backpacking tourism, visit at a few skull repositories incurs 'custom fees' (Hviding 1998, 39). Back in 1898-99, A.C. Haddon, on his expedition in Sarawak, observed a ceremonial demand for heads somewhat above what was available in local stashes. Rajah Brooke favored recirculation rather than taking fresh heads. He recognized the need for setting up governmental repositories, where heads could be borrowed according to need. Haddon writes: 'These skulls are labelled A, B, C, etc., and a record is kept of each borrowing transaction' (Haddon 1901, 395). No lack of benevolent colonial exactitude here, an inventory of human material may have seemed like a library's invention of reading material.

The Abiding Allure

The Bugkalot's interaction with the head takes place in a brief instant, just tossing it. In this brittle situation, I infer, any prereflexive experience of empathy might compromise one's quality as hunter or warrior. *Bona fide* rituals of transition may call for cultural rules to be shattered for an instant. In the portrayed instance of the headhunter's kill, there may be horror but only in a moment along a temporalized path toward adulthood. The act of tossing the head is overtly transgressive, a visceral revolt even if it simply reifies a cultural artifact of manhood to be proved. The disarray of the kill itself appears to have been replaced with fulfillment in a rather scripted celebratory feast *buayat* (not mentioned by Mikkelsen). M. Rosaldo emphasizes the qualification for manhood aspect; Mikkelsen de-emphasizes it.

In the wider view of Southeast Asian ethnographies, one might ask, however: Why do people not want to bury their past? According to McKinnon, the Tanimbarese of East Indonesia abandoned headhunting when subjugating themselves to the Dutch rule early in the 20th century (McKinnon 1991, 8 [incl. ftn. 6]). But even so, the awareness of the practice, including the fears, would still live on during its 'season,' the dry period of the year. In other places in Southeast Asia, the awareness may live on in oral and plastic

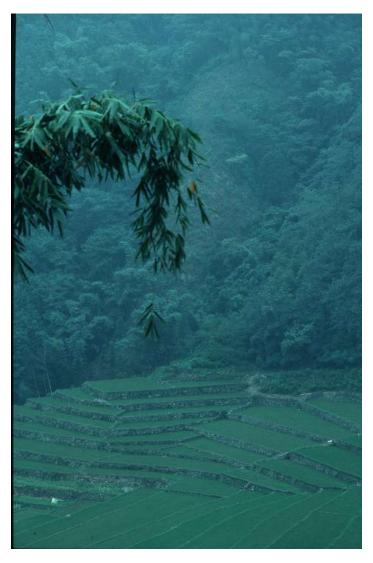
culture, through the usage of mock heads such as coconuts, effigies – and even in the dressing old heads in palm leaves to make them look realistic (cf. George 1996b.) Among the Kalinga, even a headhunter's knife receives celebratory attention: a fetish may be born (De Raedt 1996). But unlike what is the case in Sulawesi (George 1996b), the celebratory songs that might leave hints about a valorization of cutting heads have seemingly not been transcribed by ethnographers. Hocart, however, makes an exception to this; he quotes lyrics recited at the Solomon Island skull-houses (Hocart 1922). The same applies to De Raedt in his record from the Kalinga in the Luzon Cordilleras (De Raedt 1996, 175), and Hoskins from the Indonesian island of Sumba (Hoskins 1996, 229–230).

The Bugkalot do not venerate the head, but other Southeast Asian peoples do. Sahlins, in a note on Southeast Asian ethnographies, writes: 'enemy heads are analogous to stranger-kings' (Sahlins 2012, 140). George gives excerpts from headhunter's songs that contain words of care for dampening the passion (lasting desires) that might linger on with their presence in the village (George 1996b). The words may sound nice, but it is questionable if they express empathy. Could they, rather, be just the 'reenactive forms' covered by other terms such as 'pity,' 'sympathy,' 'compassion' (Hollan and Throop 2011, 7)? Or could they simply be plain flattery: words made for cajoling the head into secure growth in the fields? Headhunters' songs, if extant, may answer this question.

M. Rosaldo did not publish headhunters' songs (cf. George 1996b, 12), but could the tunes have rekindled a spirit of the headhunt? A similar contingency is noticeable in Yang: The New Tribes Mission did not encourage recital of celebratory songs, 'lest they tug at their hearts and awaken the old ways' (Yang 2011, 163). The Philippine state may have wanted to churn culture shows out from the headhunting tradition, but according to Yang, a recreation of the *buayat* celebratory feast 'would evoke strong emotions, pull their hearts, and make them want to kill' (Yang 2011, 179). The Bugkalot resisted this invitation. They seem to have realized that the line between art and action can be tenuous. Celebratory *buayat* chants may have been no less incendiary than the *Rock Around the Clock* in the mid-1950s in the West and possibly some heavy metal and rap music thereafter. Could it be that the horror recounted in biographic narratives vanished soon after the kill and that it is the celebration, rather, along with the traditional lyricism and tonalities, that is most distinctly left in memory? Song and dance may turn the lived experience of the kill into a tale.

Connective Heads

Needham is critical to interjecting ideas about mystical forces as motivating headhunting (Needham 1976). A trope such as Kruyt's *zielstof* – 'soul-stuff' – has weak ethnographic provenance (Kruyt 1906). Bloch, in a somewhat different vein, nonetheless looks for a connection between taking heads and augmenting vegetal fertility (Bloch 1992). He compares the headhunting Bugkalot (based on M. Rosaldo) with the more peaceful Buid of Mindoro (extracted from Gibson [1986]). He sees a correlation between headhunting and sacrifice: both induce growth as they take place in the context of agricultural ritual. Headhunting, in this view, generates something more transcendental and permanent than agricultural, sacrificial ritual. Headhunters cull vitality from the severed head. Nonheadhunters, in a somewhat less productive mode, cull vitality from sacrifice. In Bloch's assessment, these are alternatives aiming at the same end: invigoration of growth. Fertility defines the conceptual apex. Let me add here a reflection from own fieldwork



among Austronesian speaking groups: in the highlands of Taiwan (Formosa) and along the foothills on the Aborlan Plain in southern Palawan of the Philippines:

The Bunun in the mountain range of central Taiwan (Røkkum 2002) have a moiety type of kinship arrangement, one that bisects their society. Although phrased in the idiom of exogamous patriclans, I soon realized that extraction in the Bunun group Takibak'ha was not simply inherited. It was often earned, either through commensality on game that had been tabooed by a prior ritualized sprinkling of millet or through the sharing of a skull trophy after going together on a headhunters' raid. (This convergence, incidentally, matches the association of headhunting with game hunting reported by Collier and Rosaldo [1981].) The former Japanese colonialists had

forcefully separated the Bunun males from trophy heads stored in niches in stonewalls, by resettling their villages in the present lower ranges of the mountain massif. But the notion lived on, still, when I carried out fieldwork in the early 1980s. Bunun males could enjoy a unique togetherness, one which sets off a rule of exogamy if having celebrated together the taking of a head. The *fait accompli* makes them a *tashitu shidoq*, 'oneness as a family.' There is no mystical aspect of fertility here; the Bunun see the taking of a head as the defining act of overriding kinship in the biogenetic sense of father-son relations. It is transcendental only in such pragmatic sense, by continuously refashioning the moiety arrangements of Bunun society. There is no sense here of fertilizing millet, even if that agricultural grain has a definable ontological status among the Bunun.

Among the Tagbanua of Palawan in South Philippines (Røkkum, forthcoming), slash-and-burn cultivators of upland rice make the killing of fowls a mandatory act at both the opening and concluding parts of the cycle of tasks. I watched blood dripping on the ground in the ritual announcing the opening of the season. But this – as a metaphoric association all too easy to draw with Western gloss – does not justify a view that fertility to the Tagbanua comes out of blood-stuff. The perspective here is not even human: in the view given as that of the *diwata* spirits, there is not even anything metaphoric in the

concatenation of blood and rice. What these spirits actually see when blood drips down is a beautiful red glow. It is precisely here – in such instantaneous switch of view coming with the kill – that we might discern something convergent between headhunting and sacrifice. The split of a second tossing of a human head described by Mikkelsen could also declare a switch in some respect, from face to non-face.

Finally, regarding empathy: the possibility raised by Mikkelsen that cultural patterning can open up for a negative – manipulative – side of empathizing is intriguing if taking into account a default interpretation seeing it as placing oneself in the situation of another. Either way, there is a further question to be addressed, about the social framing of empathy. The ground for empathizing may not uniquely be one of self => other but rather one of other => self. In a study of a Polynesian community, the Anuta, in the Solomon Islands, Feinberg concludes that the linguistic term that touches on our concept of 'empathy,' aropa, 'is expressed in overt - usually economic behavior' (Feinberg 2011, 162). This would constitute one example of social framing. In the anthropological project, therefore, we may intercept linguistic projections of what in English goes as 'empathy.' We can also see their concomitants in social life, as among the Tagbanua of Palawan, who practice sharing of rice harvested on their swiddens with those whose crops were ruined by wild pigs, birds, and monkeys (Røkkum forthcoming). This is highly reflexive – resonant – behavior, although sharing here does not match very well categories such as 'empathy' and 'compassion.' Even our word 'sympathy' prioritizes the inward-outward perspective. Tagbanua comments on the habitual assurance of help exclude its relevance for diwan, the strangers (such as settlers in their area). Empathy is bounded in some way.

So how do people draw this line between those worthy of empathy and those who are not? The question to be asked here is about an interiority not of the person but of the group: as empathy is highly alive among people of the same kind but not so much alive among those who are not. The instance could be one of *selective empathy*; it may mirror the figurations of group boundary. Persson and Savulescu see such non-spontaneous empathy as 'making evolutionary sense' (Persson and Savulescu 2017). But it would be quite facile, I think, to assume *ipso facto* that inclusion or exclusion is fixed in the way of a 'boundary.' Siverts has illustrated the point in an ethnographic account of the Amerindian Aguaruna Jívaro: 'As headhunters, they recognize only Jívaro heads as worth taking' (Siverts 1978, 216). Group boundaries may give some protection to those on the outside but not to those who are, by birthright, on the inside.

Bugkalot heads were also worth taking, at least there seems to have been no rule against it. As reported by Mikkelsen, Bugkalot headhunters did not target definable Others specifically, such as Christian lowlanders or nearby living Negritos, although Willcox's account, as mentioned above, may suggest that members of these groups had, in fact, had their heads cut off. There may have been no *natural* enemies. Willcox tells us that Bugkalot may have had few qualms about targeting in-laws: the case he adduces is one of Bugkalot perpetrators and Negrito victims (Willcox 1912). Intermarriage happened between the two groups. One cannot rule out the possibility, therefore, that some killers may have known their victims fairly well. Besides, if the kill were to be carried out as an ambush, some familiarity with terrain would be advantageous as well. That would favor going into neighborhoods. M. Rosaldo, to compare, emphasizes a restraint on targeting people of the same kind as oneself with violence: 'Enmity is often undermined by

'knowledge' of enduring kinship' (Rosaldo 1980, 208–209). In her account, kinship is the factor that patterns the choices of making a kill or not making a kill. Yang identifies a feuding unit as a 'territorial descent group' (Yang 2011, 163). A further issue is whether the kill would mobilize the victim's descent group for revenge, what Yang identifies as the *tobģat*, revenge (Yang 2011, 170).

When Bugkalot male informants give expression of pity and terror (Mikkelsen 2017, 11), the case may well be one in 'which empathy is culturally patterned' (Mikkelsen 2017, 6). Alterity needs to be declared; the Bugkalot headhunter performs this in action by tossing the head. The familiar face of an in-law, for example, is removed once and for all. If fear is an aspect of this, it might well be augmented by the likelihood of retributive violence. The nearer the victim is to the killer, the less likelihood there is that the headhunter would like to tend the cranial remains in a 'skull-house.' The tendency toward in-group killings among Bugkalot may explain why, unlike the case of other ethnographies mentioned in this article, there is no post-mortem interaction with the head. The case here, with no clear in-group versus out-group identification, may not be the one I referred to above as selective empathy but rather, given the nondeterminacy of the kill, be one of reflexive empathy (Persson and Savulescu 2017).

Mikkelsen sees empathy and violence *not* as antithetical; identification with the other may in fact come as a precursor to violence. In the case of the Bugkalot, aggression happens not before but after the kill. This is what the headhunters themselves recollect. Words of pity also appear in the reminiscences recorded by Mikkelsen. He adduces comparative notes from within the Southeast Asian region: people feed the head, and they wrap it in cloth to guard it against cold. Hollan with a view on an ethnography of the Toraja of Sulawesi asks nonetheless if empathy is 'a luxury that only those with adequate care and resources can afford?' (Hollan 2011, 203). Hoskins (1996, 14) raises some doubts, however, about a generic validity of the humanizing the head observation made by McKinley (1976). Let me intersperse with my own reflection:

People can *act* with empathy, with sympathy, with pity; but these evocations of interiority can hardly be deemed 'prereflexive.' Depriving the head of its face opens up for *treatment* of it as an object: as a collectible if stored in a Western museum or as a memento if stored in a Bornean 'head-house,' or a Melanesian 'skull-house.' Even the celebratory framing itself – the artistic enculturation of the kill – might have been so dazzling that there would be little cognitive space for accommodating its (lost) human features. The head would quickly become either a collectible or a memento.

Crapanzano addresses the issue of transgression with a view on the filtering effect on the erotic by the symbolic. His view is about a 'tendency to violate,' but that is not a violation against the 'prereflexive,' but rather quite the opposite, about 'the erotic as symbolic activity' (Crapanzano 2006, 177). Taboo violations involve such symbolic activity; they may be said to go against human nature, but they are inevitably culturally underpinned. Songs of celebration or invocations to spirits, I suggest, may hold these clues as to how matters of aesthetics and romance can quickly stamp out a presentational image of gore.

Conclusion

This has been a comment on Mikkelsen (2017) and some additional literature. Issues raised in *Facehunting* deserve further comment and discussion along such conceptual lines

as 'prereflexivity' and 'transgression.' A question to be addressed, even in a broader view on the *nature* of violence, is whether the capacity to place oneself in the situation of another – to empathize – is ingrained in human character without, at the same time, tacitly upholding a thesis of 'the psychic unity of mankind.' But even without access to reports of informant emotive interiority in the historical reconstructions of headhunting, it would be possible, I suggest, to study a reverse image of empathy:

Ethnographic record may reveal culturally patterned ways of affixing *otherness* to a severed head, either this is preconfigured, as in the cases of declared enmities, or impulsive, as in Mikkelsen's portrayal of the Bugkalot case. *Defacing* the head seems to be one way of reconfiguring it as an illustrious Other. This, in my view, is what makes the act (such as the one of tossing the head in the bush) truly transgressive. Strangeness replaces – felt – familiarity, maybe even empathy. In an extended view on headhunting ethnographies, I have emphasized that the transfiguration of the head, as a memento, a trophy, or an enshrined spirit may hardly warrant any assumption of lasting empathy. A severed head is *an object of* a culturally assigned treatment that in some cases may not differ very much from obeisance demanded under the norms of religious iconography, not least the sculptured ones. Its defacement might even be what opens up for an emotional multiplexity comprising awe, respect, pity, and of course, horror. But these are modulated feelings, culturally motivated to some degree. The skull has from then on a role to play as an effigy.

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Book Review

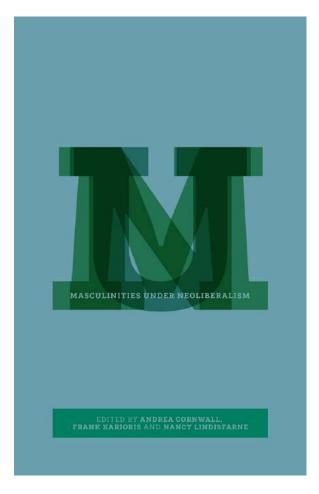
Masculinities under Neoliberalism

Cornwall, Andrea, Karioris, Frank G. and Lindisfarne, Nancy (Eds.) 2016. Masculinities under Neoliberalism. London: Zed Books.

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The advent of neoliberalism has had immense consequences across the globe —not only in relation to deregulation of national economies. Rather. neoliberalism is being recognized as a form of population management that operates through the incorporation of various norms related to the optimization of the human subject. This happens in particular through a strong emphasis on values of entrepreneurship: in neoliberal capitalism, humans are seen as free agents, although, as critics often point out, only free to choose within the terms set by the market. Neoliberalism thereby appears to have two faces; it postulates an emancipatory potential, but this potential is pursued within powerful and confining moralized discourses of consumption. This constitutes a fundamental conflict not only in the lived realities of people across the globe but also, one could argue, in the academic effort to produce novel insights into such lived realities. For one



might ask: how can we write openly about a political phenomenon as criticized as neoliberalism without succumbing to the intellectually constraining negative preconceptions, justified or not, that are reproduced throughout the academic world? This becomes a tension in much scholarly work—and this is also the case in *Masculinities under Neoliberalism*. The question is if such a tension is productive in expanding the readers' ability to comprehend how the global forms of governance are impacting people's lives? This collected volume, I will argue, is largely successful in this endeavour.

Polyvalence of Neoliberalism

Contributing authors have backgrounds in social anthropology, and detailed ethnographic accounts form the base for discussion throughout the chapters. The authors focus in particular on the lived realities, meanings and practices that are being formed within the shifting structures of the global economy. This proves to be a powerful approach to an area of research where much has been published in recent years. While neoliberalism is almost always framed by a singular, adverse vocabulary that envisions neoliberalism as an all-consuming, global force, *Masculinities under Neoliberalism* avoids the pitfall of being dazed by such pervasive narratives. Rather, the book reminds us, following James Ferguson, 'not to cast neoliberalism in the singular and [to] pay closer attention to its polyvalence' (p. 24).

Given its ethnographic approach *Masculinities under Neoliberalism* is not just an important, comprehensible and extremely timely endeavour to grasp the immeasurable impacts of neoliberal reforms. But, by taking the reader to a variety of settings - from post-conflict Sierra-Lione, Asian migrant communities in the United Arab Emirates, to industrial workers in Russia - it also reflects the sense of up-rootedness, distress and trepidation - and, perhaps, of new political openings - which saturates the imagination of people across cultures and societies. For this reason, far from being merely a piece of detached scholarly work, *Masculinity under Neoliberalism* is itself a historical document, a product of its own time, written in the incongruous prose of urgency and futility that captures the spirit of today.

Due to its evolving nature, neoliberalism is inherently slippery and uneven, and it is difficult to come to grips with its effects on men's lives. However, it is clear that it offers a normative framework for entrepreneurial behaviour, self-making and self-management, which individualizes success and failure and, consequently, naturalizes inequality. The chapters demonstrate successfully the manifold ways men in different cultural contexts respond to the exigencies of neoliberal economic governance as well as how the ideals of manhood are reconfigured and negotiated in the process. Thus, I find several of the contributions in this volume invaluable to comprehend how masculinity can be perceived as multi-dimensional aspects of people's lives, which, for instance, deeply affect their attachment to their workplace and extend into their home lives. To me, the most important accomplishment of this book is its insistence on allowing questions of masculinity to emerge while simultaneously allowing gender to remain unfixed. By showing how conceptions of masculinity emerge from the entanglement of traditional values and emergent economic structures, the book repeatedly reveals the limitations of relying on simple categorizations as a way to convey an understanding of gender issues across cultures. The authors insist that rather than having a fixed nature, masculinity is historically and spatially produced.

Crisis of Masculinity

The book sets out to show that although the neoliberal ethos may at first glance appear gender-neutral, it is not always the case. In fact, to grasp the local impacts of neoliberal governance, gendered effects must be taken into account. While the book sets out to offer an account of masculinities under neoliberalism, what seems to be the focus - with only a few exceptions - is the way that neoliberalism brings about a *crisis* of masculinity. While not expressed so explicitly, the sense of loss associated with masculinity leaves the impression that a proper, 'traditional' masculinity has given way to the flux of late capitalism. Masculinity is framed in terms of dislocatedness, precarity and disappointment. The latter is a theme that runs through many of the chapters; for

instance, patterns of consumption and increased living costs render men unable to live up to the rather ubiquitous ideal of the man as a provider. Thus, men see themselves eclipsed by women in their households, which severely undermines men's claims to authority in cultural contexts where respect for men is deeply bound up with their capacity for material provision. It would be interesting to read more about masculinities among the well-off social classes that have capitalized on the economic policies of recent decades.

Masculinities under Neoliberalism turns out to be an extensive collection of papers that offer a remarkable ethnographic richness. It succeeds in both being true to the abstract, sociological level and in weaving together engrossing tales of people living under the aegis of global neoliberalism. The book can thereby be read by all those seeking to gain new and stimulating perspectives on a diversity of ethnographic settings. But the relevance of this book extends beyond geographic contexts. The 17 chapters included in this work will resonate with broader ideas in the field of masculinity studies - and most of the chapters are replete with at once narrow and expansive meditations on a range of themes relating to continuities and changes in the way masculinity is understood and constructed across ethnographic fields.

Throughout the book, much ground is covered, and the picture that emerges is necessarily complex and incomplete. The book moves quickly from one topic to another and while this could, in other anthologies, cause a general sense that one did not get quite enough time to digest each chapter, due to the thorough editorial work, this book, in fact, manages to maintain a steady pace that allows the reader to dive into each chapter. What I missed is a conversation between the texts. As is often the problem with this type of anthologies, the ethnographic cases appear to have been picked haphazardly from a great number of potential cases. This constitutes an underlying weakness of the book when reading it cover to cover. Arguably, the book would have been strengthened by a more systematic comparative effort. This, however, does not lessen the value of the individual chapters.

By all appearances, this is yet another scholarly work that seeks to frame the intricacies of late capitalism with the conceptual boundaries of neoliberalism. But in reality, through its ethnographic attention to masculinity, it becomes a profound dissection into different life-worlds today. *Masculinities under Neoliberalism* is poised to inspire future research by showing how the (ethnographic) study of masculinity can help to address and even recast critical concerns in relation to precarious lives today.

Book Review

Man or Monster? On the Banality of Evil

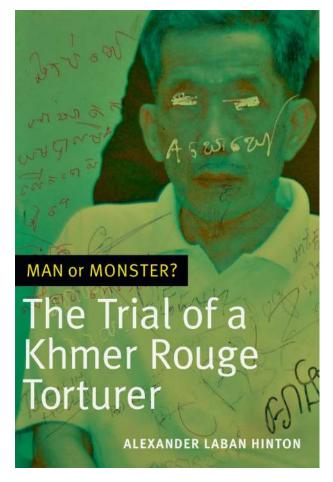
Man or Monster? The Trial of a Khmer Rouge Torturer by Alexander Laban Hinton, Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2016.

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Man or Monster unravels through the trial of Kaing Guek Eav (aka Duch). Duch became the chairman of S-21 (otherwise Tuol Sleng), the dreaded prison and security system of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge regime. He was said to have officiated or led most of the tortures from 1975 to 1979. The international legal apparatus, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), arrested him in 2007 on breaches of the 1949 Geneva convention, as well as gross human rights abuse. He was eventually found guilty of torture, and in most cases also of execution, of over 12,000 prisoners.

Alexander Laban Hinton's style uncannily mirrors the subject matter, the course of events, as well as the characteristic fall outs and issues. In his characteristic *hybridity* of and in text, he introduces first person narratives, field notes, prison artefacts and survivors' accounts - especially



following the significant gap in time when the *Tuol Sleng* became converted into a museum. The hybridity in text and the heaviness of the trial-material does place the reader into a liminal zone where the reader risks becoming a participant. The book is divided into parts that frame the trajectory of the story, e.g., 'Confession' and 'Reconstruction'. The dominant spaces into which the narrative is divided are – the museum, the biography of Duch, the trial rooms, and that which separates narratives of confession and of reconstruction.

The narrative around which *Tuol Sleng* is imagined is significant. Unlike the holocaust museums of global north, this one is a predominantly a conceptualisation of the PRK (People's Republic of Kampuchea) regime that followed and enhanced their socio-

political legitimacy vis-à-vis the fascist precedent. As brutal as the regime of Pol Pot or the trials of Duch were, the author also highlights that museums like this one are institutional representations of past that inevitably erase some of the contingent contexts as well as international actors. The artefacts are nuanced; like dead prisoners, bashed in faces, Van Nath's paintings on gory events like bayonetting of children, photographs like that of a woman with a baby when she was admitted (Chan Kim Srun), the furniture or the cover photo of Duch himself; all invoke divergent states of mind. Duch, whose image was selected as the cover of the book, with scribblings across the face, and writings on the side, himself inaugurates the uncanny of this book.

The overarching temporal frames of narrative are the photographs in which children welcome the Democratic Kampuchea in 1975 following the long civil war. The narrative weaves on through the 'protagonists' like Pol Pot, Nuon Chea, Son Sen and the Duch himself. Hinton points at the absence of accounts on the war as such, especially the upheavals involved in the currents of Vietnam War as well as the heavy US bombings in the region. He goes on to highlight the continued support Khmer received from western powers and the marginalisation of the PRK in the United Nations forum. Like with the portrayal of characters (with photographs displayed) such as that of Him Huy, the fact that many were pulled into savage acts, as Duch himself claimed in trials, becomes evident. The museum is effectively used as a space that problematizes the disparate visual vignettes and the deletions involved.

The idea of erasure, obfuscations and backgrounds involved in narratives as well as complex recollections thus become dominant motifs throughout the book. Hannah Arendt's fundamental thesis that ghastly acts are not often perpetrated by the odd, the insane, or psychopaths, but rather by normal human beings, gains ground when the deletions of the contexts are taken into account. Savagery becomes banal when it operates in the normality of the everyday, and when it gains spontaneity aided by a system in place and a bureaucratic order that works things out. Beyond Pol Pot and the Duch, it is the ordinary people's participation, witnessing, neutralities, and taken for granted-ness that normalise evil. The banality of evil gets lost in the vignettes highlighted in the museum.

The biography of Duch also becomes an interesting addition. Born in Kompong Thom, he began his career as a teacher, with good academic background and a past of meticulous work. This was in Cambodia where teachers are highly regarded as people immersed in learning and knowledge. The idea of classroom for interrogations, torture and execution, at his later role, looks at first like a great reversal of the roles often associated with spaces. When Duch and his men fled Phnom Penh, they left a huge array of different documents. The school then became a museum – from school to torture rooms to museums. Here, Hinton's thesis of banality of evil, as it proceeded in Cambodia, gains credibility. As the guards and witnesses report, the meticulous academic and hard-working teacher, operationalised pedagogy in scrupulous and diligent record-keeping, experimentation in torture methods and political education sessions. All this while memorising French poetry, and having a wife and four children. During the trial's first phase, he acknowledged the severity of his crimes and publicly apologised before the court.

The trial as such, becomes the heart of this book. To Judge Lavernge's query during the trial, Kaing Guek Eav says that the name Duch itself was a common one, given during the political clashes in the 60s, he liked it, but it did not mean anything in particular; this further emphasises the uncanny, which along with erasure, and banality becomes an important motif.

The complex problem of delivering legal solutions post trauma (exterminations, genocides), is further complicated by the ambiguous and contradictory roles adopted by the Duch; man, teacher, lawyer, judge, defendant, victim, perpetrator, repentant, and then monster; according to Hinton. Drawing certain parallels, such as with the Nuremberg military tribunals, attention is drawn to the shortfalls of jurisprudence that seeks 'to classify horrific events through an abstract formulation that trims away complexity, detail and ambiguity' (p. 291); legal process itself becomes an erasure, as did the museum. Here 'the decision of "guilt and non-guilt" pushes aside all shades of grey' (p. 292). There were other tangential issues like allegations of political scandal, constitution of the legal apparatus, different systems of legalities (civil, common), summed up in some of the significant journalistic reports that Hinton points at.

Hinton pursues the method of ethno-drama, from the gory tour of the notorious Tuol Sleng, now a museum, by the students, separated by a gap, informed by the characteristically redacted museum, through the witnesses and recollections, into the trail chambers. The Duch, the victims, the prosecutors have the 'backdrop' of the artefacts, the recollections, and of course the hybrid courtroom.

The book keeps reminding the reader of the banality of evil, by pointing exactly at the unattended details that pass off as natural, everyday, or structural. The focus on the top five Khmer Rouge officials including the Duch, or the bare 'event' of persecutions (severe and unsettling enough as they are) or even a regime as such, erases many other processes. Duch himself, at first, apologises, but says in the beginning that he was only a part of a long chain of command and thus not an active agent in all the savageries.

Hinton's work definitely brings a new enriching perspective, through a unique and experimental ethnography, to a corpus of literature that addresses similar topics. David Chandler's book *Voices from S-21*, puts forward the 'culture of obedience' idea and pools together Nazi, Indonesian, Argentinian, and well as the more recent Balkan or Rwandan episodes of tragedies and exterminations (Chandler 2000). Chandler inquires into how regimes of obedience take effect by essentially othering the victims, prior to a programme of violence. Othering may also be understood as an outcome of a whole range of deletions in understanding, Raul Hilberg's concept of the 'bystander' captures as well the situation through the difficulties in defining the role of the perpetrators, victims and the supposed bystanders at the time of Nazi atrocities (Hilberg 1993). When, individuals, authorities, bureaus and offices are understood as a whole, 'bystanders' become problematic. So does Erin Baines' depiction of the Ugandan war criminal, Dominic Ongwen (Baines 2000). His brutal episodes, starting as a child soldier, could be reduced to the bare events. But here, in the context of a brutal rebel order catered to by war economies, Ongwen is split between the identities of a victim and a perpetrator. John Pilger's classic documentary, The Silent Death of Cambodia (1979) as well as Chomsky and Herman's 'Distortions at Fourth Hand' (Chomsky and Herman 1977), were also provocations into the redacted. The latter refers to the Nuremberg trials that resonate in Hinton's book. The trials were inevitably for crime and were invariably post-facto. But the literature becomes timely in the face of the contemporaneous discourses of utopian globalisms and worldclassness from elsewhere (India, Sri Lanka). Here the banalities of developmentalism normalise and overshadow some of the worst genocides like in the state of Gujarat (2002) in India, by turning them into stand-alone events with no context (save the debates on how many were killed or how).

Perhaps it is apt to end with a quote of a passage from *Man of Monster*: 'If "conviction" refers to the proving of legal guilt, it also means a firmly held belief or opinion. Both of these senses are related to the term's etymological connection to the word "convince" which is derived from the Latin *convincere*, or to "wholly" (con-) "conquer" (vincere). Along these lines, "conviction" may refer to a strong investment in an articulation that is asserted to the exclusion of alternatives, which are "conquered" by the conviction at hand' (p. 293). This sums up the difficulty of producing this hybrid book on such a human life.

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