



Newsletter of the Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex

## Sussex Student exhibits at the Noble Peace Centre

Three comic strips created by **Benjamin Dix**, a Sussex anthropology PhD student, were launched at the Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo.

The trilogy of comics, created by Benjamin and illustrator Lindsay Pollock, tells the stories of three Syrians, Khalid, Mohammad and Hasko, who fled their homeland and made their way to Europe.

They have been serialised in The Guardian ([www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/11/comic-strip-refugee-journeys-syria-europe](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/11/comic-strip-refugee-journeys-syria-europe))



This is the latest in a series of literary comics about contemporary social and human rights issues that Benjamin has

developed through his organisation *Positive Negative* - <http://positivenegatives.org>

**POSITIVE  
NEGATIVES**



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### Our Students

On Tuesday November 17th, students at Sussex along with others on campuses across the UK took part in a National Day of Solidarity with migrants and refugees. The day of protest action was aimed at the UK government's immigration policies.



**Congratulations to our recent PhDs:** Astrid Jamar, Sajida Ally, Padmini Iyer and Aleksandar Dimitrovski.



**Congratulations to Ana Rosenthal Mena** who graduated with an MA in Anthropology and was awarded the Bill and Scarlett Epstein Prize for her dissertation: *Occupying the Olive Tree: An Anthropology of Landscapes in the West Bank, Palestine.*

### New Research

#### Anthropogenic Soils

Sussex Anthropology is behind pioneering work on African soils that addresses both local prosperity and climate change that has recently been published in a top ecology journal, *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*.

**James Fairhead** led a team that has identified for the first time an extant indigenous soil management system in West Africa where farmers target waste deposition to transform extremely poor tropical soils into enduringly fertile and carbon-rich black soils. The team have coined these soils "African Dark Earths". Collaborating with soil scientists at Cornell and anthropologist Kojo Amanor in Ghana, Fairhead and Sussex post-doctoral research **James Fraser** (now at Leicester) reveal how these soils durably store vastly more carbon and are better structured and

richer in nutrients than the original soils. Anthropological fieldwork showed how these anthropogenic soils make a disproportionately high contribution (24%) to total farm household income despite their limited area, and the team argue that these soils thus provide a model for raising the fertility of highly degraded



**Children filling a wheelbarrow with ADE in Borkeza, Liberia**

soils in an environmentally and socially appropriate way in resource-poor and food-insecure regions of the world. They also do so in a "climate-smart" way as they sequester carbon and so show the climate change mitigation potential of carbon-poor tropical soils.

**Dinah Rajak** is part of a new collaborative project that has just started at the University of Bergen. Funded by the Norwegian research council the project, "**Energethics: Extending the anthropological understanding of corporate social responsibility**" seeks to explore the relationship between different corporate forms of ownership and governance and the style of Corporate Social Responsibility

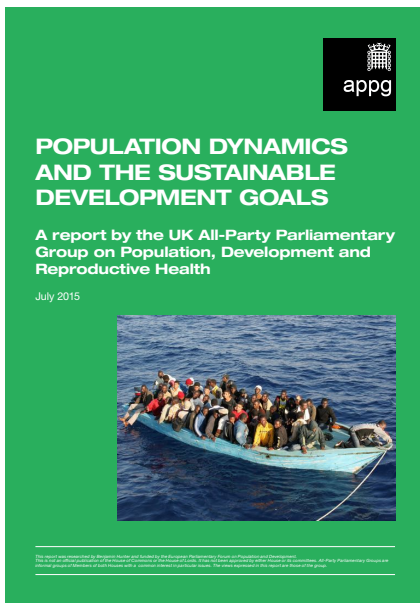
they pursue.

For more information see: <http://www.uib.no/en/project/energethics>



## Research Centres

### Centre for Cultures of Reproduction, Technologies and Health (CORTH)



CORTH members **Maya Unnithan** and **Sajida Ally** have contributed to the new report of the UK All Parliamentary Party Group on Population Dynamics and Reproductive Health that was launched at the House of Lords last year. The report on Population Dynamics and the Sustainable Development Goals examines the interplay between population dynamics and urbanisation, climate change, migration and conflict. It will be used to guide discussions, funding and programmes of the post 2015 development agenda.



CORTH was also the host for the recent EASA, RAI and Medical Anthropology Network conference on **Anthropology and Global Health: Interrogating Theory, Policy and Practice**

Participants on a Maternal Health panel



**Dr Silvia de Zordo** will be joining CORTH and the Anthropology Department from April this year to carry out her ERC funded project on 'Women travelling to seek abortion care in Europe: the

impact of barriers to legal abortion on women living in countries with ostensibly liberal abortion laws'. Silvia has received over a million Euros for this exciting cross country research. We look forward to hosting this important project and having Silvia with us.

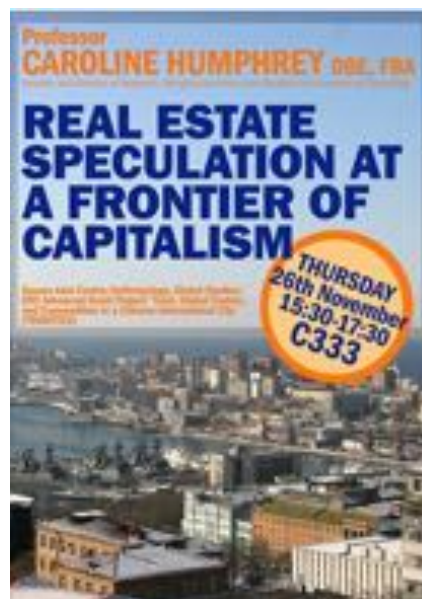
### Sussex Asia Centre

Members of the centre have recently hosted a number of events including the **Intimacies Across Asia Conference**.



The conference featured speakers from all over the world, including the Universities of Singapore, Toronto and Edinburgh. One keynote was given by Singapore's Brenda Yeoh, and focused on migrant workers and migrant wives in Singapore. The afternoon keynote was given by Dr Jieyu Liu of SOAS, who spoke about intimacy and intergenerational relations in Rural China.

The Centre also hosted the event **Real Estate Speculation at a Frontier of Capitalism**



**Dinah Rajak, Mareike Beck** and Catherine Dolan organised a workshop and doctoral student masterclass on **'Precarious Economy: Informality and entrepreneurship at the bottom of the pyramid'** as part of an ongoing collaboration between Sussex, SOAS and Edinburgh on "doing well by doing good: capitalism, humanitarianism and international development".

Participants came from the US, Canada, Austria, France, across the UK and Sussex to consider whether the shift to inclusive development offers a meaningful response to precarious livelihoods and transformative opportunities for enhancing security and mobility, or merely shifts responsibility for solutions and coping strategies onto individuals, families and local communities.



### PhD Research

Through her PhD, 'Transitional Justice Battlefield: An Aidnography of Practitioners' Everyday in Burundi and Rwanda', **Astrid Jamar** describes the institutionalisation and professionalisation of transitional justice (TJ) and aid practices. Under scrutiny in her thesis is the 'battlefield' in which TJ practitioners argue about the past, a battlefield created by the frictions between the universal TJ discourse, the resulting technocratic aid practices and the often silenced, but highly politicised negotiations and implementation on the ground.

Her doctoral research establishes that while TJ practitioners disseminate a positive discourse designed to help societies emerging from violence, their practices are actually nested in trenchant hierarchical structures and influenced by tensions from the violent past. Furthermore, the assumption that their technical work can fix dysfunctional states results not only in a silencing of the emotional, social and political dynamics in play, but also demonstrates a form of imperialism, leading to the reproduction of multi-layered unequal structures, paternalistic behaviours towards beneficiaries, privileging of implementers over 'beneficiaries', and the repetition of counterproductive practices.

## Critical Debates on Research Ethics: ‘Have we become too ethical?’ symposium



This international symposium brought together academics, ethics committee experts and representatives of national and European funding agencies to discuss research ethics. Six international speakers discussed ethics review at home and in transnational collaborative research. There were also five delegates from funding bodies (Wellcome Trust, ESRC and ERC) and professional associations (ASA, BSA) who answered questions about ethics review in social science research.

Over the last two decades ethics review by committee has become compulsory for all UK-funded research involving human participants. A number of countries are adopting a similar framework while others, like the US, are moving towards abolishing its ‘Common Rule’ for the social sciences. The complexities of matching different kinds of disciplinary research with standardised research ethics is one of the main reasons for this move. The symposium raised the question as to whether ethics review has become too

restrictive or too permissive, and explored the consequences of ethics review for conducting social-science research.

Symposium attendees discussed the conflicting notions and assumptions of ethics, complex research fields and the diverse cultural and social contexts in which ethical problems arise, as well as the complexities of implementing ethical guidelines in practice, and how these issues challenge the way we define and monitor research ethics. The symposium reached two main conclusions.

First, there is often incongruence between research ethics as designed by funders and institutional governing bodies that entails concerns of risk, reputation and public management, and ethical issues as they arise in the research field. This is particularly problematic for anthropologists, as formal ethics guidelines are often too rigid to apply to ethnographic fieldwork, which in turn requires flexibility in order to deal with shifting and challenging circumstances. Prioritising objectified ethics review over method and epistemology can jeopardise the welfare of both researchers and research subjects. **Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner**, symposium co-organiser, suggested that conforming to impractical formal ethics requirements can be counterproductive for researchers at all levels, including students.

At European institutions there is a trend to

regard research data as co-produced by the researcher and those being researched, moving from attempts to create ‘evidence-based ethics’ to an establishment of ‘conscience-based ethics’. ‘Being ethical in the field’ was found more important than ‘complying to formalised research ethics’.

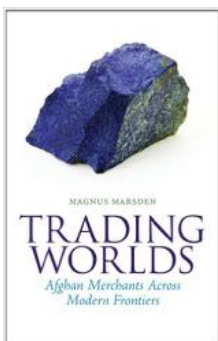
Second, the funders and professional organisations were surprisingly open and flexible regarding the special needs of fieldwork and the impossibility of obtaining informed consent, the difference in ethical standards in different communities, and the difficulty of asking for permission to do fieldwork in a field-site prior to research. Funders recognised that ethics review cannot be static and are currently developing new ethics toolkits that reflect the dynamic and processual character of research.

The discussion on research ethics review will continue in a colloquium at the University of Durham this spring. For more details and videos of the discussions see: <http://tinyurl.com/gtsonfe>.



### Hot Off the Press!

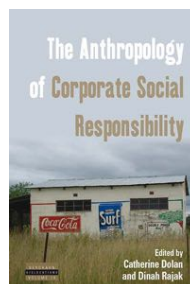
**Magnus Marsden**, *Trading Worlds: Afghan Merchants Across Modern Frontiers* (Hurst, 2015).



*Trading Worlds* is an anthropological study of the rapidly expanding global trading diaspora of Afghan merchants across Central Asia and Europe. It contests one-sided images that depict traders from this and other conflict

regions as immoral profiteers, the cronies of warlords or international drug smugglers. It shows, rather, the active role these merchants play in an ever-more globalised political economy. Afghan merchants forge and occupy critical economic niches, both at home and abroad; and in global cities such as Istanbul, Moscow and London, the traders’ activities are shaping the material and cultural lives of the diverse populations among whom they live.

**Dinah Rajak** and Catherine Dolan, *The Anthropology of Corporate Social Responsibility* (Berghahn, 2015).



*The Anthropology of Corporate Social Responsibility* explores the meanings, practices, and impact of corporate social and environmental responsibility across a range of transnational corporations and

geographical locations (Bangladesh, Cameroon, Chile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, India, Peru, South Africa, the UK, and the USA). The contributors examine the expectations, frictions and contradictions the CSR movement is generating and addressing key issues such as the introduction of new forms of management, control, and discipline through ethical and environmental governance or the extent to which corporate responsibility challenges existing patterns of inequality rather than generating new geographies of inclusion and exclusion.



**Paul Boyce** recently spoke with researchers from Stockholm University in an episode of the podcast series, **AnthroTalking**.

Paul talked about his fieldwork in West Bengal, India, studying same-sex sexualities and transgender experiences related to modernity and social change. Find it at: <http://tinyurl.com/lwac6f6>.

**Paul** is also organising a research colloquium, with colleagues from Birkbeck and the LSE in February.



## Notes from the Field: Return to Uppalagarh, December 2015. Maya Unnithan



**Maya with Mali Bai**

Uppalagarh is a remote village in the Aravalli hills, one of the world's oldest mountain ranges in Southern Rajasthan in India. It is home to the Girasia community, 'tribal' descendants of the former ruling Rajput clans. I had the opportunity to stay there for a year in 1986 as part of my doctoral research. With its rocky terrain, lack of roads, absent electricity and scarcity of water, life in Uppalagarh was difficult. Part of my initial interest was in how everyday life was conducted in such harsh terrain. I also focused on kinship and gender politics and whether Girasia women who became wives through bride-price transactions (in contrast to the practice of dowry prevalent elsewhere in India) gained power in their families and control over property. This became the topic of my doctoral thesis and subsequent book.

This past December I visited Uppalagarh again after a gap of nearly 28 years. The first, immediately obvious change was the

row of pylons running through the main valley. This new source of electricity is, I learned, primarily used to draw water from the ground to sustain crops. Household energy consumption, on the other hand, is powered by small solar panels, along with wood and kerosene. This access to water and electricity has improved the lives of families but another key impact on their lives has been access to state benefits.

Overall the State is also much more tangibly present than it was in the late 1980s: a number of government run programmes are clustered in small buildings around the village school. The school itself has been expanded to provide secondary level education. Mobile phones have also arrived - every other household has a mobile phone although mainly for

emergency use as connectivity is only assured at the top of a hill.

Most thrilling of all was that Kali Bai and several others whom I knew well are still alive. Kali now heads a large family of children and grandchildren. She has started up a women's self-help group in her house. Her daughter has taken on the role of the ASHA - a new category of village health-worker. Her main role is to accompany pregnant women to the hospital to give birth. For this journey to the local town of Uppalagarh they depend on the mini vans now plying the main road, another novelty.

Another noticeable change was that most of the younger men I met were dressed in trousers and shirts rather than in the dhoti and turbans of before. Some like Sawa Ram even rode a motorbike. Women, however, were still wearing the ghagra-odhani (skirt and wrap) and I was told bride-price was still prevalent, in fact rates had inflated. The devra and bhakar baosi (places of worship and of the mountain spirit) looked well attended and cared for.

While it would take a longer trip to truly assess the nature of change taking place in this still remote corner of Rajasthan it was exciting to learn about the changes that had occurred and what remained the same.

### A View of the Landscape



**2016 Winter Graduation**

## Sussex Anthropology: Who We Are

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